

Tamamaru
Illustrator Kinta

7

My Quiet
BLACKSMITH
Life in Another World





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Prologue: The Guards of the Black Forest

“How is it over there?” I asked.

“All clear!” came the response from a short distance away. The voice belonged to Samya, a half-tiger member of the beastfolk who was currently twitching her nose.

“We’re good here too!” said Helen. She was a skilled mercenary who was now staying with us after being embroiled in the empire’s mess.

Today was our day off. In other words, I was free from my usual blacksmith duties. So, as a sort of refresher, we’d all decided to go for a stroll in the Black Forest. Krul, the family drake, and Lucy, our wolf pup, were of course here too. I said we went out for a “refresher,” but in truth, no stroll through the Black Forest was going to be easygoing. In the past, we’d met—well, stumbled across, actually—a certain foe here.

It all started a while back. Samya’d mentioned spotting an unusual ore in the forest, so we’d gone for a walk in the woods. We’d run into a dragon. Had it been as small as Krul, about the size of a horse, it would’ve just been an unexpected encounter. However, the beast had been rather large, and it’d attacked us while breathing fire. A dangerous situation indeed.

Back then, Samya’s childhood friend Jolanda (who was a wolf-type beastfolk), and Flore, Helen’s junior, had helped us out, so we’d managed to slay the creature. Dragons rarely appeared, but they ate magical energy. In the worst case, one could show up in an area of the forest where that energy was most concentrated...i.e., near Forge Eizo. There were no guarantees that we could defeat the creatures every time, and even if we did, I didn’t want areas around us to take collateral damage.

And so, we proceeded to stroll through the forest while looking for any signs of a dragon. For now, Samya, a pro of the Black Forest, and Helen, a pro mercenary, couldn’t sense any traces of one.

“Huh,” I remarked.

Lidy, an elf who was another member of our household, closed her eyes and quietly said, “I haven’t detected any abnormal power either.”

Lidy could no longer live in her hometown. However, she needed magical energy to maintain her physical body, so she’d decided to stay in this forest. Elves were pros when it came to magic, and luckily, she didn’t sense any energy signatures that might indicate a dragon.

I nodded. “Then I guess we can leave this place.”

Everyone cheered, “Okaaay!”

“Look at all those cute things!” Diana exclaimed enthusiastically.

Though still young, she was the daughter of a count. I’d first gotten acquainted with her because of a fuss at her household, but afterward, she’d started to frequently visit when seeking an escape. She’d adapted to the forest lifestyle at an alarming rate.

“Good eye,” said Anne, the empire’s seventh princess.

She’d started to live with us after the incident with Helen in the empire. Perhaps because of their similar noble upbringings, Anne had gotten along especially well with Diana, and the two would apparently sit and chatter away after dinner. I use “apparently” because I generally went straight to bed post-meal.

Diana pointed to a small clearing filled with fuzzy little creatures waddling about. She loved stuff like this, and would often find them during her regular hunts. Usually, we’d need to decide if these cute things were edible...but since we weren’t looking for food today, we could gaze at them from afar.

The first to make a discovery was Rike, my dwarven apprentice. “What is that?” she asked before immediately surging ahead.

We hastily tagged along and saw her clutching a glimmering stone in her hands.

“You scared me when you suddenly ran ahead,” Samya said wearily.

Rike stuck out her tongue and apologized. “Sorry, sorry. I was just taken by the sparkling stone and I couldn’t help myself.”

When it came to blacksmithing, Rike had a tendency to sometimes—I mean often—lose sight of her surroundings. She was normally a kind and well-mannered person.

“You think it’ll be useful?” I asked.

She shook her head. “It’s pretty, but I think we can only polish it.”

Rike moved her prize into a sunbeam that was peeking through the foliage, and the stone gave off a metallic luster. At a glance, it looked as though we could process it somehow, but my cheat notified me that we couldn’t do much with it. *It’s like fool’s gold*. In my previous world, it might’ve been useful for stuff like sulfuric acid or semiconductors, but its only worth here was as eye candy.

“We might be able to use it for some kind of decoration,” I suggested.

“You’re right,” Rike replied with a smile.

Then, another voice reverberated through the woods. “What’s that?!” they cried before running off into the trees.

We all looked at each other and laughed before giving chase.

Chapter 1: My Usual Morning

Once Anne and I returned from the secret meeting between the kingdom and the empire, we ate the dinner that everyone had prepared for us—I noticed their cooking skills had improved. Afterward, we headed straight for bed, as all of us were dead tired.

Though we'd only met the emperor for a brief moment, it had been mentally draining. Most of us fell into our beds immediately, consciousness quickly fading to slumber.

The next morning, I'd gotten a good night's rest, and my body felt back to normal. After all, I was only psychologically tired; I hadn't exerted myself physically. Once I'd stretched my body and rolled my shoulders, I headed outside—Krul and Lucy were eagerly waiting for me.

"Good girls. Let's go get some water, hm?"

After petting them both, I brought out a water jug. Krul was the only one carrying the jug for now, and I wondered if Lucy would one day do the same. *I hope we can all live safely until that time comes.* With four water jugs in hand, I idly walked through the forest. Today was a lovely day. The light of dawn filled my surroundings, making me feel chipper.

Krul and Lucy, perhaps noticing my good mood, seemed to be in high spirits as well. Krul had a bit of a bounce in her step, and Lucy was running around Krul while barking energetically. As I took in the wholesome scene, I breathed deeply, trying to inhale as much morning air as possible. The temperature was still cool, and the crisp chill of daybreak filled my lungs. This bracing air completely snapped me out of my drowsiness, and my mind felt refreshed. My head was now filled with plans for today, but I prioritized this calm period of time I had for fetching water. I gently shook my head and cleared my mind of all thoughts.

We eventually reached the lake, and I filled the empty jugs with water. While I was doing so, Krul took the lead and entered the lake with Lucy. It was bath

time for them.

The lake's surface was cool to the touch, and I wondered if there were several flowing springs providing a source of water. I hadn't even been in this world for a year, so I was yet to experience all four seasons, but if the water remained this cold, it would be useful on warmer days. *Though, it may pose a problem in the frostier months...*

Krul and Lucy splashed around having fun until I finished filling the jugs. I then quickly wiped their bodies dry with a towel so that they wouldn't catch a cold. If our travels didn't take us far, then they were usually only covered in dust and dirt instead of oil and grease. *But it's not like they're never exposed to grease... I should occasionally wipe their bodies with lukewarm water or use the women's soap to shampoo them off.*

Now, it was my turn—while I didn't strip down naked, I washed my face and wiped down some of my body. I probably didn't use much water, but I still wanted to conserve as much as I could for use back at home.

Once I was done, I worked with Krul to bring the heavy jugs to the cabin. Lucy wasn't carrying anything, but she ran around as though to appeal that she *could* handle the weight. Though she was looking more like a beast by the day, she couldn't carry anything larger than her own body.

“Arf! Arf!”

“Kululu!”

While Lucy was barking in protest, Krul gently cried out to calm her down. The name “Big Sis Krul” had started to suit her.

And with that, my morning calm and the first task of the day had slowly come to an end. By the time I'd returned with the water, almost everyone was awake. It'd taken quite some time for me to make the trip. As noted, *almost* everyone had risen—it went without saying that Anne was still fast asleep.

“She did say she wasn't good at waking up,” Diana said nonchalantly. No one else seemed to mind either.

“She's not Eizo,” Samya reasoned. “She can't recover from a trip like that so quickly.”

“Hey, I was pretty exhausted too,” I protested.

“Your base stamina is just too different,” Helen countered. “You’re on par with me, after all.” It had been a while since she’d come here and stopped being on the front lines...but I couldn’t refute the claims of a professional mercenary.

“I’m sure she’ll slowly start getting used to waking up early,” Rike said. After me, this dwarf was the earliest riser. She was an artisan and thus quick to wake.

The next person up was usually Lidy, who’d previously lived in the forest and was currently giggling at our conversation. Samya and Helen awoke at around the same time, and Diana was last. *But I guess Anne’s gonna be last now.* We weren’t living with a clock, and if she was a late riser, that would soon become the norm. No one in our family had any complaints.

As each person got ready, I went to the stove to prepare some breakfast.

A bleary-eyed Anne rose while I was making our morning meals, and everyone else helped her get ready for the day. She had a larger frame than Helen, but when everyone was watching over her like that, she looked like the youngest child. Meanwhile, I continued to prepare breakfast for my grown daughters.

“So, should we take care of *that* first?”

“That’s right,” I replied.

After breakfast, I told everyone of my future plans.

“We need a bed for Anne, and another room,” I said.

Samya gave me a look. “*You’re* the one who insisted that we didn’t need another one.”

“I know...” I mumbled, scratching my head.

I’d stated that another room was unnecessary because I hadn’t expected my family to grow once again. However, Anne had indeed joined us, and there was no guarantee that we’d stop there. And above all...

“Though the rainy season is over, it would still be useful to have a storage shed during long bouts of stormy weather,” I said. “And, in the one in a million

chance we get another person to join us, it's best to build the shed—that way, we can transform it into a room if needed.”

“Yes, that's true,” Diana said in agreement.

“I do believe it's a bit unreasonable to think that your family *won't* grow in the future,” Lidy murmured. Her tone sounded cold.

Everyone nodded firmly at her statement and Anne, our most recent addition, gave a dry laugh.

“A-Anyway, we can't let a member of our family continue to use the guest room, so let's start cleaning up,” I suggested.

Though they couldn't manage to cheer in unison, awkwardly, I received words of assent from everyone. We then got to work.

As it was, the hallways in our current house were shaped like an *L*. At the end of one hallway was a terrace, so we couldn't add any rooms on that side. I decided to extend the other hallway perpendicularly—this would convert the cabin to a crude *U* shape surrounding our farming plot. With that extra space, we could certainly add on more rooms.

I was worried that sunlight wouldn't reach the crops in the plot, but Lidy said that since the south side of the *U* structure was open, it wouldn't be a problem. If I were to build even more rooms, I'd need to either connect the hallways in a square shape or consider extending them elsewhere from the terrace. Regardless, I *was* worried about the sunlight, and I most likely needed to create an annex or a separate building just in case. *Not that I'm planning on gaining more family members or anything. None of that at all.*

And since we were quite the large family, I decided to simultaneously build a bed. Lidy, Anne, and I would be in charge of the bed; the rest of them were tasked with building the rooms. Lucy would be our cheerwolf to encourage us.

“You guys are a lot better than me at building rooms,” I remarked.

“Well, of course,” Diana said with a sigh. She picked up Lucy, enjoying the pup's fluffiness.

Helen and Anne's rooms had been built while I'd been away; Samya and Rike

had built their own rooms in the past too. In terms of experience, they had far more than me.

“I’ll leave it all to you guys,” I said.

“Sure, we’ve got this!” Samya declared, pumping her fist.

I roughly tousled her hair and went back to my own work. There was already a bed prepared for Anne’s future room, but I decided to make a new one. Though she fit into her bed all right, I noticed that it was a bit too small for her.

While I was cutting some materials, I said, “The bed in the guest room’s a bit large. How was it for you?”

“I...could barely fit,” Anne admitted sheepishly.

Perhaps she was late to rise because she couldn’t get a good night’s rest. I felt guilty for making her endure that. It may have been fine if she’d only intended on a short stay...but with her future up in the air, bad sleep would take a toll on her body over time. Since I was building a bed from scratch, it was crystal clear that I should create one suited to her physique.

“Then let’s make a super luxurious one,” I proposed. “We’ll have a canopy and shelf by your head.”

“We can engrave the legs and the shelves with intricate elven designs—it’ll be a work of art,” Lidy added.

“Oh, don’t do that,” Anne protested. “I *am* interested in both the engravings and the canopy with a shelf...but please, don’t.”

We laughed together, and I proceeded to saw through the materials.

“The saw of a peerless blacksmith cuts very well,” Anne observed. She watched up close as I cut various items. Samya had complained about the saw in the past, claiming that it made her feel weird because the tool had cut things *too* well.

“Peerless...” I mumbled.

Anne nodded. “I think sawmills around the world would want it.”

“I don’t plan on providing anything of this quality to the outside world.”

Had the tool been an elite model, I might've considered it, but I couldn't just give out custom models offhandedly, even if it was just a saw. If someone wanted it, they'd need to come to our forge themselves—this was a condition I'd set for even the emperor, and I had no plans of changing it.

"I know," Anne said with a forced smile as she pulled the saw back. "Like Samya said, this does make me feel weird."

She let out a real laugh this time.

"This size...should be good enough," I said.

I used just my eyesight to approximate the materials and then cut them to the same length. While my cheat abilities weren't as effective since building a bed wasn't exactly smithing, they still provided some help. When I matched up the cut boards, I saw that Anne had ended up with a queen-size bed. *Though, she's a princess, not a queen.*

"How's this?" I asked.

"Let's see..." Without hesitation, she lay down on the boards. "Hup! Yeah, this seems fine."

Her body definitely fit; she had some leeway all around her. I knew this would be a more comfortable bed for her frame, but a sudden question came to mind.

"If we make a bed of this size, won't your room become cramped?" I asked.

"Should we try it out?" Lidy replied.

"Yeah..."

We carried the boards into the house and placed them atop the current empty bed. The room obviously felt much smaller.

"How is it?" I asked.

"The space is big enough," Anne replied. "I didn't bring much stuff with me, so I think it'll be fine."

"But isn't your room at home much larger?"

"Well, you needed to exert a certain degree of dignity and pride at the palace

—my private room was indeed large, even though there were barely any people. The furniture was luxurious...but I don't think I used any of it effectively."

"That so?" I mused.

"You're going to create a spare room to store any extra stuff, aren't you?" Anne asked.

"Yeah. We're not going to make an additional new bed for it, so that space will just be for storage."

I was planning on moving this room's old bed to the storage space. Since I was going to procure a new set of bedding for Anne, I planned on getting another spare, allowing me to accommodate two guests at the same time. However, I was highly dubious of us suddenly welcoming two visitors in a short amount of time.

"Then, if I can't fit all my necessities in my own room, I'll place them in storage," said Anne. "I doubt that'll happen though—I'll prioritize storing items that everyone else can use."

"All right. This is your room, so you'll make the rules," I replied.

I wouldn't have to worry about extending the house for a while, but it *had* grown rather large. I inhabited the original bedroom that'd come with the cabin, and the adjacent study had become the guest room. On the other side of my bedroom was Samya's, and Rike's was next to that. There were also Diana and Lidy's rooms, as well as Helen and Anne's. Beyond that was the terrace.

I was staying in the main building, and the row of connected rooms belonged to the women—the terrace sat at the end. Since the newly built rooms were on the other side of the "U-shaped" bend (opposite the women's rooms), that side felt more like an annex to me.

"By the way," Anne said. "You're an elf aren't you, Lidy?"

"Yeah, as you can see."

"My father never married an elf, so I haven't lived with one before. I was under the impression that elves didn't often do heavy labor, but I see you

casually carrying stuff around.”

“Yes. We’re not that different from humans or giants,” Lidy replied. “Pardon my impertinence, but I heard that you’ve lived with various other species.”

“For lack of a better word, I’ve more or less lived with almost all the general species.”

I’d heard that giants, beastfolk, dwarves, malitos, and even lizardmen were members of the imperial household. *Yeah, Anne’s really lived with all types of folks. The only ones left are the elves, demons, and merfolk.* Elves and demons required magical energy as one of their sources of food, and they couldn’t live in areas where magic was sparse. Merfolk never left bodies of water, and it seemed that even the emperor couldn’t take one for his wife.

“I was actually a bit anxious because I’d never lived with an elf before,” Anne continued. “But since you don’t seem to be all that different from everyone else, I thought I’d be fine.”

“At the very least, it’ll be no different if you leave because you get tired of my lifestyle,” I joked.

Lidy hit my shoulder and Anne smiled.

“All right. Let’s make this, shall we?” I proposed.

“Yeah,” agreed Lidy.

“Let’s!” Anne chimed in.

We took the boards outside once more. I now had to create the legs and the rest of the bed. Though I wasn’t sure if I could finish it by today, we had time, and I wasn’t in a rush. After eating lunch, we went right back to the bed, but the day ended with us just cutting out the necessary parts. I wanted Anne to get used to this line of work, so I had her basically do all of it herself—this caused a delay, but her progress was decently fast.

However, Anne didn’t seem satisfied with the results. “Hmmm... This isn’t going well.”

“If a princess like you, who’s never touched a tool before, suddenly makes a perfect bed, you’ll run all the furniture craftsmen out of business. It’s more than

enough that you've cut all the pieces straight," I told her.

"I think that's more thanks to your tools."

"My father used to tell me that tools are heavily dependent on the user. I think you can be proud of what you've done."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

Anne's mood improved with my words. I wasn't sure if she'd one day be forced to leave us, but she had plenty of time for now. She could get used to this life little by little.

We hadn't cut out the interlocking mortise and tenon joints for the bed yet, so we had more to do than simply assemble everything. At the earliest, we'd be done by the day after tomorrow.

"Now, a toast to Anne's visit," I called out.

"Cheers!"

"Kululu!"

"Arf! Arf!"

That night, we hosted a welcoming party for Anne—I prepared plenty of preserved meat and dried vegetables to create a luxurious dinner. Since it was a joyous occasion, we took some light sources, tables, and chairs outside so that Krul and Lucy could join in on the fun. Their food was, of course, unseasoned and safe for them to consume.

"I knew this would happen with you, Eizo," Samya said. She stuffed her face with deer meat jerky while sipping on some wine.

Apparently, I lacked trust in this area, as everyone nodded along in agreement.

"But, I really welcome your arrival, Anne," said Diana. She was drinking wine and eating boar meat stewed in wine. The rest of the women seemed to agree with the sentiment, nodding amicably once more.

"Thank you, everyone," Anne replied. "I hope this doesn't sound too weird for

me to say, but I've lived in a completely different type of environment until now. If I do anything wrong, please let me know."

"I think you'll be fine," Rike said, pouring herself a third glass of hard liquor.

I always encouraged everyone to drink without reservation during cheerful occasions. Since they never really held back, I'd brought out the alcohol in a decanter-like piece of pottery.

"I've been under everyone's care for a while, but I can live without any major problems despite the different species and ranks of everyone here," Rike added.

"I'm not too worried either," Lidy noted. She was also enjoying some wine, alongside soup made from root vegetables. "But I'm originally from the forest, so our situations might be different."

"I've traveled across the world, but the lifestyle here suits me, y'know?" Helen said. She was voraciously chowing on some boar meat fried with *miso* and washing it all down with hard liquor—Rike immediately refilled her empty glass. I'd expected Helen to return to her mercenary lifestyle, but it seemed she'd be with us for the foreseeable future. *Not that I mind, though.*

And so, the welcoming party with Krul and Lucy grew lively with discussions about living here. Once we decided to draw the night to a close, Anne came up to me looking sleepy.

Her droopy eyes turned even droopier, and she said, "Please take care of me from now on."

I only had one reply to give.

"Welcome to Forge Eizo, Anne."

###

The next morning, no one seemed to suffer from a hangover. In fact, we all woke up feeling energized. Had anyone tried to match Rike's drinking pace, they would've gotten piss drunk, but everyone seemed aware of their limits.

"How are the rooms coming along?" I asked.

"We're having Krul help us, so it's going well," Diana said.

Samya nodded in agreement. “Should be done in three days at the earliest.”

If they had at least three days of work left, then Team Bed would be able to jump in and help out soon. After breakfast, I didn’t have any blacksmith duties, but I gave my daily prayer to the *kamidana*. Anne had seemed a bit confused by this ritual at first, but she’d gotten used to it and had eventually followed our lead. Religious connotations aside, it was an effective method of amping myself up.

“I’ll finish up on the parts, so I want you two to start assembling,” I instructed. “Anne, you can just ask Lidy if you need guidance.”

“Okay,” they both answered.

The wooden parts had already been cut—I just needed to quickly carve out the mortise and tenon joints with my chisel then hand them over. Lidy had chosen to steady the parts while Anne would use the mallet to hammer them in place. Every now and then, Lidy would point out a precise area, and Anne would slot the parts in with a loud *thud* from the mallet. The joints locked in place smoothly. As I repeated the process of handing them pieces for assembly, the lumber slowly started to form a bed. We didn’t create a shelf by the head this time.

“Now, we just need to add the planks,” I said.

“Right,” Lidy replied.

I didn’t mind doing this bit alone, but since it was the perfect opportunity, I decided to let the bed’s owner handle it.

“Like this?” Anne asked.

“Yep,” I said with a nod.

Anne placed the nails on the planks and confirmed their positions with me before hammering them in. Because she’d occasionally helped out with smithing work, her swings were steady. After a few knocks, the nail pierced through the plank and the framework underneath. After doing this several times, the planks were all properly hammered into place, and the bed was complete.

“Yeah, this should be good,” I said, touching the finished bed.

I confirmed its sturdiness and found the parts to be firmly nailed together. It wouldn't easily break, even if Anne jumped on her bed, though I was dubious about her doing so. I'd have fluffy bedding prepared, which Camilo would gather for me, and since we didn't have any springs, I didn't think she'd be jumping around. *She won't...right?*

Both Lidy and Anne were happy to hear my words. *Feels good when you make your own stuff, huh?* I'd chosen the profession of blacksmith to feel that joy.

The three of us carried the bed inside, entering from the terrace. We used to go through the living room, but ever since we'd built the terrace, it'd been used as our entry point. I'd previously been worried about sanitation in the living room (since it'd been such a high-traffic area), but it was now more convenient to enter terrace-side—it was truly the ideal spot.

“Here?” I asked.

“A bit more over there,” Anne said.

“Here?”

“Yeah, that's good.”

“All right.”

The bed was now properly installed. It'd been a while since we'd had lunch, and it was getting late; we couldn't offer much help building the rooms today. Still, I decided to ask anyway. Diana declined but requested our assistance for tomorrow, so Team Bed was officially done for the day. The room building wasn't as urgent as the bed, after all.

With nothing else to do, we decided to transfer Anne's bedding and belongings from the guest room to her own. I was tasked with the bedding, while Anne and Lidy would bring the other small items. *I'm sure she has undergarments and stuff...*

Because we had some free time, I decided to whip up something a bit more complicated for dinner. Everyone was happy about the meal, so my efforts were worth it.

After dinner, I said, “We’re done with the bed. Once you guys finish the rooms, I should give you all something as thanks, a reward or some such. Do you guys want anything?”

“This is for our family, so I don’t think we need rewards.”

“Well, yeah, but still...”

I couldn’t say much—I’d also ignored profits for family and friends in the past. Since we were basically self-sufficient in this forest, they probably didn’t have anything they wanted either. I must’ve troubled them with my sudden request. *Maybe I was a bit too impulsive...*

I was regretting my sudden question, and everyone was nodding along. Suddenly, Samya made a fist and hit her palm with it. Her mouth was full of meat.

“Oh!” she cried. After she’d gotten everyone’s attention, she sheepishly swallowed her food. “How about we each spend a day alone with Eizo?”

“Huh?” I replied.

Though I was completely bewildered, everyone around me cheered loudly. “That’s a *great* idea!” they chorused.

“Wait, really? *That’s* what you guys want?” I asked, trying to calm the excited crowd. They all looked at me. “You can go for expensive items, you know. Accessories, or whatever else.”

“I don’t want anything like that right now,” Samya said.

Everyone kept nodding along. Apparently, they already had what they needed, and they prioritized other factors unrelated to money.

“And,” Rike added, “a skilled craftsman’s time is rather expensive.”

A custom model item was worth at least two gold coins...which could be considered my delivery-day earnings. In other words, it was likely more expensive to ask for my time than to buy some random accessory.

“That’s true,” Diana agreed. “I’d rather spend time with someone than get handed a gift.”

“Well...if that’s what you all agree on, I don’t mind,” I conceded.

At once, they all started to discuss how they wanted to spend this time with me. Needless to say, I had no room to butt in. Had they posed any reckless requests, I would’ve shot them down, but everyone seemed to have normal ideas, so I silently resumed my meal.

###

The next day, I finished my morning routine and headed for the rooms that were being built. Pillars and joists had long been installed, and rafters had been laid on top. The hallway’s floorboards were placed, and some boards lined a portion of the walls. Because I’d stated that one room would be used as storage, the hallway was a bit wider, making it easier for me to bring materials inside. The normal-sized bed that’d been in Anne’s former room was now propped up against one wall—it was taking up a portion of the space, but it wasn’t really in the way.

“At this pace, you might finish up today,” I remarked.

“Well, if you guys help us out, we might,” Helen replied.

Yep—including myself, we’ll be adding three extra pairs of hands.

And so, we divided ourselves into three teams: the board-making crew, the floorboard installation crew, and the wall installation crew. The first group would be cutting out the floorboards and walls before making boards for the roof. After that, they’d move on to installing the roof panels. That team consisted of the powerful Helen and Anne, with Krul helping out to carry the cut materials. I was worried that the two women might quarrel, but upon consulting with Diana, she said that they’d be fine.

Rike and I were in charge of the floorboards, and everyone else would work on the walls. I ordered Lucy to walk around and cheer everyone on. *I wonder...if she grows larger, will she be able to help us out?*

Taking up the boards, I hammered them onto the floor joists. I had my cheat abilities and Rike had her experience, allowing work to progress smoothly. I wanted to quickly install the floor so that there would be space for the others to work—it would also provide an area to house the building materials.

“You work fast, Boss,” Rike noted.

“Yeah? In terms of experience, I’m no match for you.”

“You have no hesitation, so it looks like you’ve got years of experience.”

“I feel more confident about my work when you tell me that, Rike.”

Because I’d just been going by a vague sense of “what felt right,” I was overcome with guilt as I continued to swing my hammer down onto the nails.

Noon came, and we decided to have lunch out on the terrace. Lucy and Krul were with us too, of course. Our lunch was the usual—nothing new—but the sun’s rays and the cool breeze gave it a different atmosphere. *This is nice.*

After we finished eating and took a short break, Samya, Helen, and Diana started playing around, running after Krul and Lucy.

“They’re so energetic,” I murmured.

“They really are,” Anne said. Though she was chasing the frolicking five with her eyes, she lacked the stamina to join in.

Of course, it might have been silly to compare one’s stamina with Samya, a beastfolk, or Diana, who tagged along for hunting and was trained well, or especially Helen, who had seemingly limitless energy.

“Let’s get back to work,” I said eventually.

I left Rike and Lidy to clean up the meal, and I went to call over the other five. *We’ve only got a bit more to go.*

We continued where we’d left off, and though we all worked quickly, we were making two rooms simultaneously. By the end of the day, we had a small, livable area—people could make do and potentially sleep there if necessary. There wasn’t a roof quite yet, and since there weren’t any trees around us, we could see the entire dark-red, dusky sky. It wasn’t a bad view at all. If I came across some transparent materials in this world, I’d be tempted to make a sunroom or an observatory. I’d also considered lining the terrace with glass, but Krul would be unable to stick her head through, so I nixed that idea.

The following day, the floorboard and wall installation teams had finished, so we got to work on the roof. The sun's rays illuminated the empty room.

"If there was no rain at all, I'd be tempted to just keep it as is," I said.

"Then all living beings, us included, would dry up," Lidy replied.

"There are living creatures in deserts, but they've got access to fog and rain at times, so they receive the necessary moisture. I guess living things can't go completely without it."

"What's a desert?" Samya wondered.

Beastfolk lived in the forests and weren't aware of deserts. Travelers also generally didn't walk through a desert unless absolutely necessary—they probably didn't come to the Black Forest either.

"It's a region where the wrath of Mother Nature makes an area hot, and there's almost no rain or blessings," I explained. "Only rocks and sand can exist there. We call that a desert."

"Huh. So can living things even stay alive there?"

"Some get their moisture underground, while others don't need that much moisture to live. I've never gone to one myself though, so I can't say for certain."

My installed knowledge told me that the desert of this world was in a country quite far from our home. If I were to use my previous world as an analogy, the country was akin to the United Arab Emirates, composed of several different state-like emirates. Though, I hadn't been able to visit a desert region, even in my second life, so I was unable to definitively ascertain the truth.

"You sure are knowledgeable, Eizo," Samya said.

"I've just had the opportunity to be exposed to different types of knowledge."

Most of my information came from books that I'd read in my previous life—I refrained from saying that and made sure my phrasing was careful enough to not be a lie.

"Teach me other stuff too," Samya urged.

“If you ever come up with more questions, sure.”

With that, I went to the kitchen to prepare lunch. After we finished our meals on the terrace, our entire family worked on the roof. Even Lucy did her best and ran around, cheering us on with her barks. Rike and I, who were swift carpenters, and Samya and Lidy, who were used to working in high places, climbed onto the roof to install the boards; the tall people and Krul passed the wood up to us.

As we layered the planks one on top of another, we slowly worked our way up and created a shingled roof. Since a good chunk of the materials had to overlap, we progressed at a snail’s pace. Regardless, thanks to everyone who’d gotten used to this kind of work, we managed to finish the roof while the sun was still in the sky.

I couldn’t help myself. I raised my arms in the air and yelled, “We’re finished!”

The other three on the roof victoriously raised their arms with me, while Krul, Lucy, and the rest of the people below offered triumphant applause. *It feels good when you finish a huge project. Maybe I should work on the connecting passageway to Krul and Lucy’s houses...* We moved the nearly made bed from the hallway into the side of one room.

And with that, we were done.

For now, the new room at the end would be our storage space. I looked around, cocking my head. “Wait, I just noticed—there isn’t a wall between the storage room and the corridor.”

“That’s right,” Diana replied. Before I could wonder why, she said, “Don’t you think we might extend the hallway from here? It’ll be easier if we have nothing blocking that expansion.”

Unable to respond, I simply scratched my head and went to the kitchen.

Chapter 2: The Fulfilled Promise

To celebrate the finished rooms, I decided to make dinner a bit more luxurious than usual. Alcohol was also allowed today. There was actually no rule in my house that prohibited drinking—if anyone wanted a drink, they were allowed to have it. However, perhaps showing consideration toward me (who rarely ingested alcohol), no one requested liquor on the regular. Even Rike never asked for any. *I only don't drink much because I can't hold my booze well.* I'd told Anne that she could drink whenever she liked, but she was adept at reading the room and followed everyone's lead. Naturally, that meant that our household really only drank during celebrations.

"All right, cheers," I said.

"Cheers!"

We clinked our glasses. Rike immediately downed hers and poured herself another. *If she likes it so much, I don't mind if she drinks more regularly.*



“Speaking of, if we get two sets of bedding, we can furnish two guest rooms,” I reasoned. “One’s a spare, though.”

“The other room’s for storage, right?” Helen replied.

“Yeah. I want to keep some items there for convenience—things that are nice to have around, even if we don’t use them constantly.” Anything else would be kept in the storehouse next to Krul and Lucy. It wasn’t too far from the house, and there, we’d tuck away items we *very rarely* used.

“Convenience items... So like alcohol and meat?” Helen suggested.

“Yeah, probably.”

Alcohol and meat were currently kept in the warehouse. It wasn’t really a hassle to go out there after finishing the day’s work, but it would be more convenient if those ingredients were in the house. *But I’ll have to be careful so that people won’t snatch the meat... Maybe I’ll put a lock on that room.*

“There’s no rush to bring the meat in, so we’ll just do it eventually,” I said. “If you guys have anything else you’d like to bring inside, let me know. We might have to make adjustments to how we store items in the future.”

Voices of understanding echoed throughout the room. Now my attention turned to fulfilling the request they’d made of me—I needed to spend a day alone with each of them.

“I’ll do what I can, but you’re out of luck on days I’ve got orders.”

“We know,” Samya replied, scrunching her nose. Since she was the one who’d come up with the idea, her wishes would likely become the standard for others. It was clear that she was careful about her choices.

“All right. Let me know when everyone has made their decisions.”

Agreement rang out once more, and dinner ended with lively chatter.

###

The next day, I got to work on my standing order for Camilo. Anne would join us in the forge from now on, but since she’d helped in the past, it didn’t affect the workflow much.

“Though you’ve worked with us before, I’m sure there’re still some things that you aren’t used to. Feel free to ask around whenever you’re confused,” I said.

“Okay,” Anne replied.

“Our newest recruit before you was Helen, but she’s been doing this for a few months now. Don’t worry about trying to match her.”

“All right.”

The hectic days had passed, and our usual daily life had begun with a new person. The clanging of iron striking against iron, the roar of the flames—these sounds filled the air of the forge. A few days after we returned to our normal lives, we managed to forge everything in Camilo’s order. The next step was to take our cargo to the city for delivery.

This time, Helen wouldn’t be wearing a wig, and Anne wouldn’t be hidden away. Disguises were no longer necessary. While it was a secret that Anne was with us, no one would assume that a princess was staying at a common blacksmith’s house. She’d made a public appearance in the past, but unless we ran into a close friend of hers, we were planning to claim that she just happened to resemble the imperial princess.

In the end, nothing particularly exciting happened on our way to Camilo’s. We did, of course, remain vigilant, and when we entered the city, the familiar guards remained silent while they wearily looked over Anne. It seemed like they’d given up on me. This wasn’t my intention, but there were merits to this relationship, and there was no reason for me to willingly provide an excuse and bring attention to the princess. We all just quietly bowed our heads as we passed by.

“It’s a bit funny to see a princess bowing to a mere guard,” I remarked. Anne stretched out her back and tried to refute, but I continued quickly. “But for now, you’re just giantess Anne from Forge Eizo. There’s nothing wrong with bowing to a guard.”

She seemed to agree and said nothing more. I was glad she didn’t object since I wanted her to be included in Forge Eizo’s daily activities.

As usual, we left Krul and Lucy in the care of the apprentice. We then

proceeded into the meeting room, and a short while later, Camilo entered.

“Feels like it’s been a while,” he said.

I nodded. “The last time we met was in the capital.”

“Yeah.”

“That was a tumultuous affair. How’s business with the empire?”

“Pretty good. The emperor personally put in a good word for me, so if things go poorly, it’ll mean I’m extremely incompetent. I’ve got no other choice but to make sure business goes smoothly.”

“I see.”

We talked about the quantity of the next order as usual, and Camilo glanced over at the head clerk. The clerk nodded and called outside. Another employee came in with a basket and a full bag. I had no idea about the contents, but whatever it was, there was plenty of it.

“What is this?” I asked.

“Here’s the message I received from the client: *I’m sorry to keep you waiting. I’ll leave Lidy in your care,*” Camilo replied.

“Elves’ seeds!”

He nodded. I’d repaired a sword for Lidy’s village—a treasured, magical one—and I’d been promised some seeds that could be bought with one gold coin. The elves had faithfully kept that promise. When I glanced at the full leather bag that was placed on the table, I thought I saw the seeds inside glimmering.

I bought my usual items and two sets of bedding; the store was large and had more than enough stock. We also piled the bag of elves’ seeds into the carriage and left Camilo’s store.

While we were leisurely traveling the roads, I said, “I’m not sure what the contents of those seeds are, but do you know, Lidy?”

“Yes, I have a rough idea,” she replied.

I mean, they are from her hometown, after all.

“Exciting, isn’t it?” I said.

“Yeah. We’ve only grown herbs in our fields so far and haven’t had a chance to raise anything else.”

We currently grew medicinal herbs for disinfecting, lowering fevers, and to stop bleeding, as well as other aromatic herbs. Mint—or more precisely, an herb resembling this plant—always grew thick, and it tended to invade and choke out the other species if we let our guards down. Because of this, we had it isolated in a wooden planter that I’d built between smithing orders.

To water our farming plot, we used water from our reservoir that we’d stored during the rainy season. I also made sure to dump leftover water from the daily water jugs into the reservoir. It wasn’t much, but taking these measures meant we had a decent water supply at all times. However, when I thought about our daily water consumption, our water for irrigation, and water needed to prevent fires (which I hadn’t worried much about thus far), I was a bit anxious about our supply. There was a limit to what four water jugs could carry.

“I should probably dig a well near our house soon,” I murmured.

“Then we wouldn’t need to go get water,” said Diana.

Lucy gave a small whine to that remark. Going to the lake for water was her daily routine in lieu of walks, and she seemed afraid that it might get taken away.

“No need to cut that task out completely,” I replied. “I’m doing it so Krul and Lucy will get some exercise, and it also helps me get a quick workout in the morning, so I’ll continue it. I don’t mind just taking a stroll, but I have more of an incentive to head out if I’ve got a goal.”

Lucy gave a sigh of relief and curled up on top of Diana’s lap. She smiled and gently petted the wolf.

Once we arrived home, we brought the goods inside. We stopped the cart behind the house, set Krul free, and carried the charcoal into the storehouse.

“Want me to put the barrels of liquor in the storage room?” Helen offered.

“Yeah, that’d be great,” I replied.

“Got it.”

She hoisted a barrel on her shoulders and brought it into the cabin. It probably wasn't an issue for her, but I guessed it was a bit easier now that she could walk inside from the terrace. We brought the bedding and the seeds inside via the same route. After lunch, we set up the beds, and the two guest rooms were now ready for use.

On delivery days, once we were all finished storing things away, each person would usually go off to do whatever they pleased in their free time. Today, however, was a bit different.

Taking the seeds out of the bag, we cheerfully confirmed each type with Lidy. We needed to decide which to plant in our fields first.

“Are these carrots?”

“We've got potatoes too, Boss!”

“These must be turnips.”

“There are even herbs here that we don't have.”

“What are these? Oh, I don't really like those...”

“These must be beans.”

When I asked Lidy if certain seeds only sprouted in certain seasons, she said, “Under these circumstances, they'll grow during any season.”

The seeds from the elves' forest had a unique trait where they could absorb energy from areas abundant with magic, like the Black Forest, and grow prolifically. If their environment wasn't rich with such energy, they'd still grow, but just normally like any other plant. Many people were after these seeds because they could apparently produce delicious crops in abundance. *Maybe I should've questioned it when I was able to harvest apples and berries simultaneously, even though they have different harvesting seasons...*

However, when I posed this question to Samya, she answered, “Nah, that's the norm for us.”

“I guess so. If it's normal, there'd be no reason to question it,” I replied.

“We elves only learned about the plants’ magical properties after we started to hand out seeds to others,” Lidy added.

That made sense—people’d probably made some complaints when the seeds, which were supposed to grow at any time of the year, had failed to mature. Upon further research, the problem had been identified—magical energy.

“All right, then let’s grow some of these,” I said.

After we’d been discussing the seeds for about an hour, I led everyone to the farming plots. It was my genuine hope that this would bring us a step closer to being self-sufficient here in the forest.

The gardens were in our backyard, but once we’d built more rooms, the space had become our courtyard. Lidy was raising medicinal herbs and other plants that were gathered from the forest; small flowers blooming from the vegetation gave off a pleasant aroma.

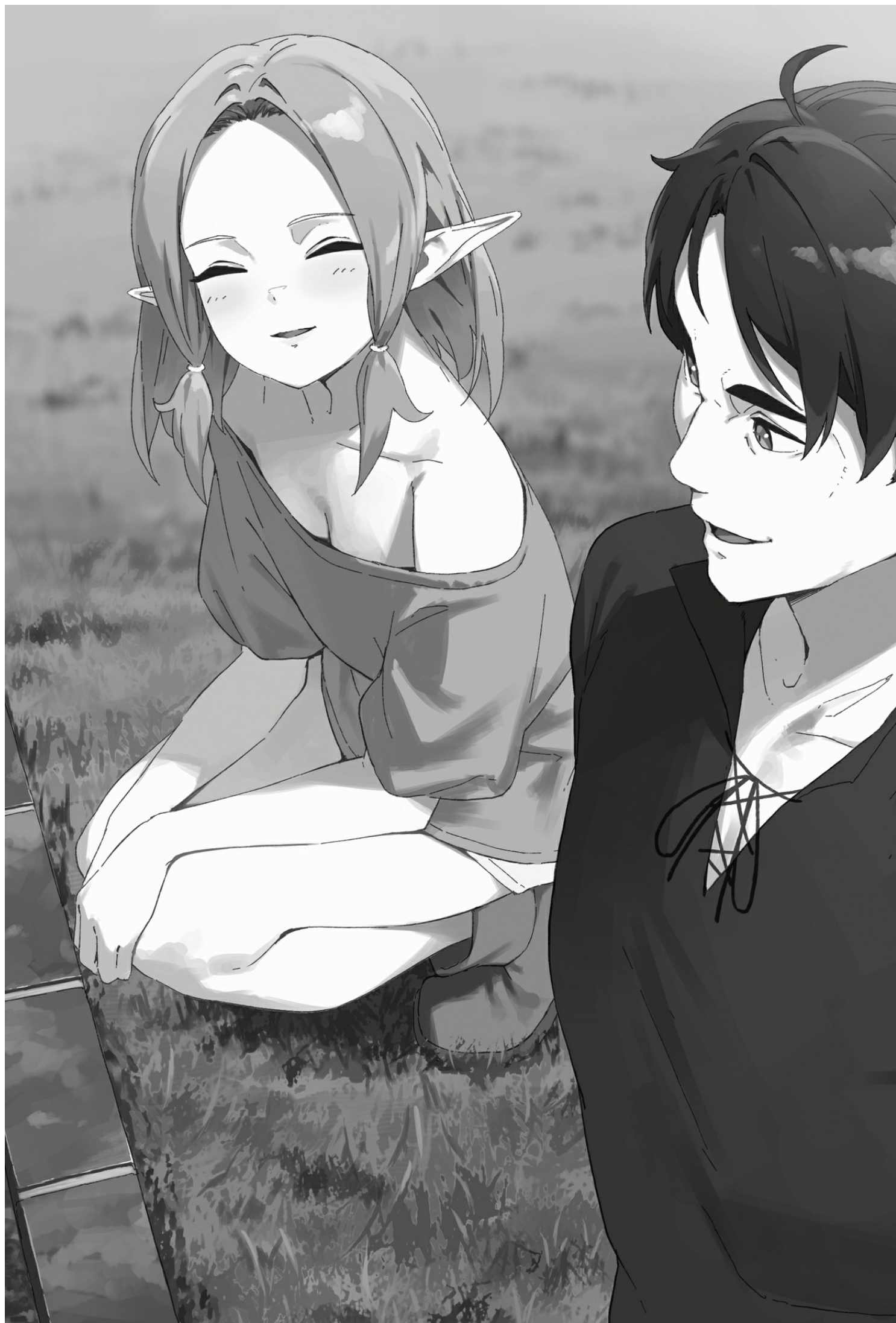
Lidy usually looked after the gardens while I was making dinner and Helen and the others were training. The soil was arable and well-maintained. However, only a corner of the gardens were filled with lush greenery from the herbs—the rest were brown and bare. Still, Lidy continued to care for all the plots in the hopes that we’d grow other crops someday.

“Let’s plant carrots, turnips, garlic, herbs, and potatoes,” I suggested.

“Sure,” Lidy agreed. “We might need to expand our gardens a little bit though.”

“Our household has got a lot of people who’re confident in their strength. We should be fine.”

“You’re right,” she said with a giggle.



If we were able to grow vegetables, I'd be able to create more dishes. I had especially high hopes for the garlic. From grilled meat to soups, garlic made a huge flavor difference in a variety of foods. But our family was filled with blossoming young ladies; overconsumption of it might cause them to worry about the smell. We didn't meet others often...but there was no harm in being overly cautious about it should we ever welcome a guest.

We had three garden hoes for tilling the soil, so Helen, Anne, and I would use them to expand the fields. Meanwhile, the others would plant the seeds.

"Hup!"

I dug my heels into the soil, raised the hoe with gusto, and swung down sharply. A dull slicing sound could be heard as I felt the blade of my tool sink into the tough dirt. I wasn't sure if it was due to the lack of rain or the abundance of magical energy, but the earth around this area was stiff. My handmade custom hoes could easily cut through this ground, but it would've been difficult to till a field of this size without them.

I had yet to make an ox plow. If I did, I could have Krul do the pulling to make my life easier. She would've enjoyed the work, but we had no plans to create that much farmland for now. Though, I figured it was only a matter of time—if we were to aim for complete self-sufficiency, we'd need a much larger field.

The three of us were lined up and cultivating the land, but Helen and I worked much quicker while Anne lagged a little behind. Though we weren't in a rush, the princess seemed bothered by the difference in speed.

"I thought you just carried on your family's name, Eizo. Why are you so used to agricultural work?" Anne asked.

"It's just like with blacksmithing. For a person with special circumstances that carries a family's name to live in an area like this, you'd need to be used to all sorts of work."

The last time I'd ever done any agricultural work was in middle school, when my grandfather had asked me to help him out. In this world, I was only fast with work because of my cheat abilities and the knowledge I had installed—it was dubious that the speed came from my own powers.

"I see. Helen, do you have any tips?" Anne asked.

"Hmmm... So you go *grrr* and put your hips into it before you go *whoosh* and stab your hoe into the ground and finally with a *swish* you tug it out."

"That was so vague!"

"I'm not good at teaching others!"

Anne apologized for her critique while Helen pouted, and the two quickly made up with a smile. *Helen kinda survives using her own instincts and talents.* I felt like she struggled to teach others because she tended to perceive things in a much more unconventional way.

While I was swinging my tool, I asked, "Hey, Helen. Have you ever worn fully plated armor?"

"Huh? Yeah, I guess I have. Never worn it on the battlefield though."

"I see."

"Whatchamacallit again? I was at some sort of ceremony, and they had me wear it as a guard of honor."

"So you weren't interested in the ceremony at all?" I wondered.

She jutted out her lower jaw, intimidating an invisible foe in front of her. *I bet she wore the armor but then was mocked about it or something.*

"I don't really like stiff and formal stuff, y'know? I requested to take it off immediately."

"Were you able to move around in it?"

"Yeah. If not, I'd just die on the battlefield. Even if it's just for show, it'd be rude if my movements were awkward."

"Makes sense," I replied, shifting my gaze to the untilled soil. I brought my hoe down.

"What, you gonna make me a set or something?" she asked.

"No..." I said, raising my head once more.

Fully plated armor easily fell within the realms of my cheat ability. The

production speed and quality would be superb—firearms wouldn't appear in this world until much later in the future, but I reasoned I could make an armor set that could endure bullets.

So, why don't I make armor, you ask?

"It'd be a pain to make because there're so many parts," I murmured.

Even my cheat abilities couldn't decrease the number of components needed. There were many, and though each individual part didn't take much time to forge, you know what they say—many a little makes a mickle.

However...

"Remember what happened last time?" I asked. "It might be worth making breastplates and shin guards for everyone."

"Oh?" Helen said with satisfaction.

"Oho?" Anne chimed in, her eyes twinkling.

"Eventually. One day," I mumbled, returning my attention to the stiff soil.

Helen, Anne, and I finished tilling the fields rather quickly. Though only one of us was experienced, we were all proud of our strength, and we didn't need to cover that much ground. So, after, we switched to seed-planting duty. To be precise, we were planting seed potatoes in the dirt we'd just tilled. We sliced off the potato eyes, rubbed some ash from the forge onto the cuts, and buried them under the tilled ground. It wasn't difficult to do, but there were quite a few of them.

A bunch of potatoes rolled out of the hemp sack onto the ground—we cut each one before we planted them.

As Anne took up another spud, she murmured, "Can't we just eat these?"

"It's sprouted already," I said. "We can remove the sprouts, shave off any green bits, and it might be edible...but they could be poisonous."

"Really?"

"Don't eat them, just to be safe."

“Okay.”

If these potatoes were anything like what I was familiar with, their sprouts and skins were filled with toxins. When I sliced into them, the insides looked fine, but there was a chance that they weren’t suitable for consumption. It was safer to just use them as seeds.

Helen planted another and said, “So that’s why some people got sick when they ate potatoes.”

I nodded. “In the worst case, if you eat a lot of potatoes in their toxic state, you might die.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. If you ever decide to return to mercenary life, keep that in mind.”

“Right. I will.”

Though I’d warned her, if Helen were to return to her former job, she’d be on the battlefield, and there were no guarantees that provisions would be in ample supply. There might be times where she’d need to eat whatever was in front of her or starve to death—in that precarious position, there’d be no stopping her. Still, even if it only brought a stomachache, I felt it best to avoid sprouted potatoes if at all possible.

With a total of seven people and two helpers—Krul and Lucy—we finished planting the seeds just as the sun was setting. The soil had absorbed the water, growing darker in color.

“If there aren’t any beasts nearby, we probably don’t need fences,” I said.

“I agree,” Lidy replied. “There were fences in my village though.”

Farmers usually had to be wary of other people, including beastfolk, dwarves, elves, and giants, but in our case, it was probably meaningless to do anything about them. I didn’t expect anyone to come here, in the middle of nowhere, to steal food from a moderately small garden.

Though these crops grew year-round, it wasn’t like they’d mature overnight. Frankly, if they did, I’d hesitate to eat them. I thought of potential new dishes I could make in the future as I prepared the night’s dinner.

The next day, I started forging weapons for Camilo's order. A knife was on my list today. After I finished my morning routine, I lit the firebed and slid a sheet of metal inside.

"We haven't made one for Anne yet," I murmured as I gazed at the metal that was slowly turning red.

"Shall we make one?" Rike asked.

"It's a symbol of being part of our family. We shouldn't exclude her."

"Then please allow me to watch."

"Okay."

It actually hadn't been too long since Rike had arrived here, but she'd quickly absorbed the necessary knowledge and skills, making her quite the capable smith. Still, she insisted that she still had a long way to go. I heavily relied on my cheat abilities for my work, and it was frustrating that I couldn't teach her efficiently, but she was making do by carefully observing my skills.

Custom knives made from Forge Eizo were given to each family member. They were extremely sharp and could be used for daily tasks or to protect oneself. Owning one was also proof of being part of my family, since knives of this quality weren't available to the public. I wasn't afraid of my techniques being stolen or anything, but it was simply much too dangerous to sell knives this deadly to outsiders.

Consequently, there weren't many opportunities to forge these custom knives. Rike peered intently into the firebed with me, eager to not miss this rare opportunity.

I removed the red-hot steel, put it on an anvil, and swung my hammer, beating the magical energy from the Black Forest into the metal. A loud *clang* could be heard whenever my tool struck the hot steel, and particles of magical energy that couldn't be absorbed glimmered and dispersed into the air like beads of light. Rike stood there and watched, unblinking.

I struck the metal, heated it, and repeated the process. After I did so a few

more times, the sheet of metal slowly started to take the shape of a knife filled with magical energy. In its current state, it was still just a hunk of steel that vaguely resembled a blade. Taking extra care so as to not shave away any of the magic, I engraved my signature cat on the pommel and returned it to the furnace.

After the knife was heated to the right temperature, I pulled it from the fire and dunked it into a vat of water, instantly quenching and cooling it. From the water's point of view, I would be heating it up; a loud sizzle filled the room as steam rose from the water.

With that, the knife was hardened. The next step was to make it tough. I blew air into the furnace to raise its temperature and create a larger fire. Then, I put the knife into the firebed. Once the temperature had increased, I immediately took it off the heat.

Now, I just had to finish it up. *After lunch though.* I called out to everyone and we all went on lunch break. Once I finished my meal, I got to polishing the blade. The cloudy knife slowly gained its sheen, glimmering as it reflected the fire from my workshop.

"And now, we just have to sharpen it," I said.

"Yes," Rike replied.

"Wanna give it a try?"

"No. I might ruin your hard work if I try to do it."

"I think you'll be fine, but I won't force you."

I did want her to eventually learn how to sharpen steel filled with abundant magical energy, and she seemed like she could handle it, but if she didn't want to, I wouldn't force her. *Guess I'll do it myself.*

I submerged a whetstone in water to dampen it, then pulled it out and started to grind the blade of the knife. Slowly, the knife grew sharper. Once I was satisfied, I rolled some deerskin around the handle.

"And...done."

"That was splendid," Rike said. "May I take a closer look at the blade?"

“Of course.”

I handed her the knife. Her eyes twinkled like a child who'd just received a new toy as she carefully inspected the blade.

“Have your skills improved?” she asked.

“You think so?”

I hadn't really felt a difference from my normal work, but if Rike had said so, it might've been true.

“I'll be making the scabbard, so you can continue to look it over,” I told her.

“Thank you.”

While I split, pasted, and carved the wood to make a scabbard, Rike continued to mumble, “Oh ho,” and “I see, I see,” while inspecting the knife.

Once I was done with the scabbard, I called out to Anne, who was putting a glob of ore into the forge. She removed the cloth that was masking her mouth.

“What is it?” she asked.

“This is for you. I could've given it to you during dinner, but I just thought the sooner the better.” I handed her the sheathed blade.

“Is this...a knife?”

“Yep. I gave it my all when forging it, so it cuts really well. Be careful when you use it.”

“Okay. But why are you giving this to me?”

“It's proof of being part of the family. Everyone has one.”

“Really?”

“Yep. You're one of us now, so I need to give this to you.”

Everyone else took out their knives and showed them off. It might've looked scary, but it wasn't unusual for me. Anne looked around and gave a firm nod.

“I see. So I really am a part of your family now. Thank you.” She clutched the knife in front of her chest.



Chapter 3: The First Person

After I spent about half a day making the knife, I spent the rest of my time working on the items for the order. I couldn't make a lot with the time I had left in the day, but the sooner I was done, the sooner I could take a vacation.

A vacation, huh? I'll probably have to spend it with someone though. During the past few days, I'd heard the household chattering away while I prepared dinner; I guessed that they'd been deciding on turns for their "day with Eizo" and other details. They were sort of keeping everything a secret from me, and I didn't think to ask them either.

Half-scared and half-excited, I was careful to not inadvertently use too much magical energy when hammering a sheet of metal into a knife.

###

Once my orders were done and I returned home, I was told that they wanted to talk with me. Everyone sat down as Rike and Lidy prepared some herbal tea for us.

"Now then, shall we begin?" Diana said.

"You said you wanted to talk," I replied.

She nodded. "It's about you spending a day with each of us. We talked about it before."

"I remember."

"Well, we decided on the order, so we thought we'd tell you who the first person will be."

This meeting felt a bit too exaggerated for something like that, but I decided to keep mum. It must've been important for them.

And so, the first person was...

The day before my vacation, after we finished dinner and cleaned up, I

requested to borrow a bow from Diana. I tried to pull the bowstring back lightly, but was met with more resistance than I'd anticipated.

"I guess you need to pull it pretty hard," I remarked.

"Yeah," she said. "When aiming at far-away targets, it needs to be taut—if it's too loose, it'll be weak and the arrow will just bounce off."

"I see."

In places with thick underbrush, moving around might alert others to your position. Thus, it was vital to aim from farther away, and a certain amount of speed was required to penetrate a target's hide. Ideally, one would want to be downwind and hidden, where scents and sound wouldn't travel to their victim in a clearing. It would also be best if the prey was within a hundred meters, but those conditions were unlikely in this forest. Naturally, the best hunting tactics were to either hide in wait or chase prey toward someone waiting in ambush.

When Samya and the others went out to hunt, they often had someone take on the role of chasing prey into their traps—this role was referred to as "the beater." Last time they'd gone hunting, Anne had come back looking exhausted.

"Then I'll be borrowing this," I said.

"Sure. Don't break it," Diana cautioned. "But, I guess I can repair it easily."

"I don't enjoy breaking other people's things, so don't worry."

"That's true."

We looked at each other and laughed.

###

The next morning, we finished breakfast and I got dressed as usual, except for one addition—a bow and a quiver of arrows were slung over my back. Out of habit, I moved to take *Diaphanous Ice* with me, but then I stopped myself.

"Wait, this'll get in the way today," I muttered.

"I'd leave it if I were you."

"Right. I'll do that."

I'd be spending today with Samya, the first person in line. Since a professional

of this forest was telling me to leave it behind, I handed *Diaphanous Ice* to Diana.

“Could you just leave it in my room?” I asked.

“Sure. Have fun.”

“I’ll be off.”

After Samya and I notified everyone else of our departure, Krul and Lucy ran out with excited faces, expecting a trip. Since they were always tagging along for hunts, they assumed that it’d be the same this time.

“Be good today and stay at home, okay?” I asked, petting them. “Your older sisters will play with you later.”

“*Kululu.*”

“*Arf! Arf!*”

The two obediently went back to their houses as I called out to them, “You’re both such good girls!”

Today, I’d be hunting with just Samya. I wasn’t used to it, and since it was just the two of us, we decided to not hunt for anything too big. Besides, we had enough meat stored, and our objective wasn’t to obtain meat—it was to go hunting together. Of course, if we did get anything, we’d take it home to eat.

This feels more like hunting for sport. I remember seeing a show about that online back in my old world. I was a little interested, so this is exciting.

“Hmmm,” I pondered. “It’s been awhile since we entered this forest with just the two of us. Soon after you arrived, Rike came along.”

“Huh, yeah, I guess so. It feels normal to have everyone around me now,” Samya replied, rustling through the brush.

We weren’t at the hunting grounds just yet, and while we had to be on guard for anything dangerous, we didn’t need to move carefully to find our prey. Today was sunny and the skies were clear; the forest had a comforting atmosphere, and the sunlight peeked in through the foliage like small spotlights. Under these spots of light were flowers, blooming like actors on a stage enrapturing an audience. It was easy to forget that this forest was

dangerous.

“I’ve been here to forage and stuff, but I’ve never gone hunting for animals,” I said while walking. *I did fight a bear, but that felt more like chasing it off than hunting.*

“It’s not that difficult. It’s like fishing... Wait, now that I’m remembering your fishing skills, I’m getting a bit worried,” Samya replied with a grin.

I laughed back and tousled her hair. “Rascal.”

“Eek!” She laughed and her body curled, but she didn’t run.

I picked a few herbs during the trek, and after we’d walked several hours away from home, Samya suddenly took a different stance. She crouched and started walking with her signature stealthy steps. Her nose twitched as she tried to use scent to scope out her target. I followed close behind.

She turned around and whispered, “We’ll walk slowly from here.”

“So we’ll target this location?” I whispered back.

She nodded, and I did the same. We slunk forward with great care. Beastfolk were true professionals at what they did—I could barely hear a sound when Samya took a step. I desperately tried to keep up so that I wouldn’t be a hindrance, but I couldn’t help making larger sounds. *Maybe I should’ve made boots with deerskin soles.* When I accidentally stepped on a branch and made a loud snapping sound, I sheepishly looked at Samya, but she didn’t seem to mind. This seemed to imply that we weren’t so close that we had to be dead quiet. *Even so, there’s no need to purposefully make loud sounds. Those animals are good at hearing, and I want to increase our chances, even if only a little.*

I stayed close behind her, doing my best not to make a sound or stumble. A while later, we made it to a spring without running into anything. The Black Forest bordered the lake, and water welled up from underground at a nearby mountain, but this particular spring had ended up forming a short distance away at our current location.

Near the spring, Samya crouched down. I hastily did the same and we both stayed still. A short while later, she began crawling and checking the ground.

“Footprints—old and new animal tracks are mixed together,” Samya whispered. “I think they’ll come by again, so let’s wait here.”

“Okay,” I whispered back.

She planned on ambushing an animal when it came to drink water. *Didn’t tigers do something similar?* I didn’t ask, just stayed silent.

Samya continued to twitch her nose as she murmured, “In any case...”

“Hm?” I whispered back.

“We’ve grown.”

“Yeah...”

She was referring to our family. At first, she’d been the only one with me, but Rike had joined us shortly after, followed by Diana and Lidy. Now we had Helen and Anne as well as Krul and Lucy. We could no longer call ourselves a small family. *Maybe she doesn’t want a household like that.* I shifted my gaze from the spring to Samya.

“You don’t like it?” I asked.

“Nah, that’s not it. It’s fun to talk with everyone.”

“I see.”

She stared back at the spring, and I did the same.

“I just thought that we’d live a more relaxed lifestyle,” she continued.

“So did I. I think I’ve pondered that the most.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.” We kept whispering to each other as we stared at the spring. “I thought it’d be only the three of us for at least a few years. Maybe Rike would leave in a year or two, and it’d be back to just us two for a while or something.”

But reality was nothing like what I’d expected. I wondered if the Watchdog was related to this in any way, but I knew I wouldn’t get the chance to ask.

“I know I said it earlier...” Samya started.

“Yeah?”

“It’s not like I have complaints or anything.”

“Yeah.”

“But...”



I felt something warm on my shoulder, and when I looked to my side, I saw Samya's head—she was looking at the ground, and I couldn't make out her expression. I nervously gulped, curious about her next words. She glanced up, and her gaze locked with mine; it looked like her eyes were a bit damp. My heart started to beat fast.

Argh, calm down, Eizo.

Suddenly, she whipped to the side and faced the spring, her nose twitching. I hastily looked in the same direction and spotted a large tree deer drinking water. Around three more were present, all much smaller than the first. *If the one drinking is the male, then the other three might be females.*

Samya and I glanced at each other, then gave slight nods. I grabbed my bow. The deer were on the other side of the spring, and we'd been hidden under thickets and bushes this entire time. I doubted they could see us well. *Of course, that's probably why they're here to drink water.* Had they seen us, they would've been more alert and wouldn't have dared to come to the spring.

I carefully and quietly removed an arrow from my quiver and fitted it on my bowstring, though I didn't pull back yet. After a short while, when I felt like the deer had finished drinking, Samya gently patted my shoulder. *She's telling me to take aim.*

I slowly extended my left arm in front of me—the base of my right thumb brushed against my cheek as I clenched my bow. At this distance and with my strength, the arrow would soar straight to its target; there was no need for me to aim in an arc. So, I aimed straight in front of me.

"The head?" I asked.

"Yeah."

Suddenly, the tree deer that was drinking water raised its head and stared in our direction. *Did it find us?* The deer seemed as though it was assessing its situation, and it peered back at us. In other words, it didn't move an inch.

I released the bowstring, unleashing all the power I'd stored. *Twang!* A sharp sound echoed through the air as the arrow flew straight for the deer at an incredible speed. Unfortunately, my aim wasn't as true as I'd thought. I wasn't

sure if there was some factor that I hadn't taken into account, or if my aim had been off in the first place, but the arrow struck the deer's neck instead of its head, sinking deep inside its flesh.

Though it was a fatal wound, there was still a chance it could escape. It would've been better for me to hit the shoulder or thighs so that it couldn't use its legs.

"Shit," I murmured.

Immediately, another sharp *twang* sounded, and a much faster arrow was released. While the deer had lowered its head when struck by my arrow, the second arrow pierced its head cleanly with a dull thud. The creature fell to the ground, and the other deer all fled like scared rabbits.

"Did you get it?" I asked.

"Yeah," Samya replied.

She was completely composed, as though nothing had gone wrong—she looked like a true professional. I slung the bow across my back once more and approached the spring to check on our target.

Suddenly, I heard her giggle behind me.

"What's up?" I asked.

"Nah, nothing really. I was just realizing that even *you* don't excel at everything."

"Of course I don't. I can wield a sword or a spear, but when it comes to a bow... No dice."

"Is that how it goes?"

"That's how it goes."

We both laughed at that as we approached our prey. The tree deer was bleeding from its two wounds—neck and head. It was large, but it didn't so much as twitch a muscle.

"Let's move it a bit," Samya said.

"Okay."

I pressed my hands together, prayerlike, in front of the fallen tree dear.

Samya looked on, eyes questioning. “Isn’t that what you always do before you eat?”

“Yeah. I’m apologizing to the life we took and expressing my gratitude for its sacrifice. I’m also praying for its soul to be saved.”

“I see.”

Her reply seemed uninterested, but she put her hands together too. It was only for a few seconds, but we prayed for the tree deer’s soul to rest in peace. *Maybe this buck will reincarnate in a different world as well.*

Samya then swiftly lashed its legs together and we dragged it away. She didn’t want the blood to taint the nearby spring and thought it best to immediately move the carcass. We used the rope to hang it from a tree, and Samya inserted her knife into the throat. The deer’s heart had already stopped, so blood didn’t gush, but it also hadn’t solidified—red droplets slowly dripped out. She proceeded to expertly wield her blade, slicing the deer’s stomach open to remove its organs. She first removed the bladder and the intestines, then the liver, stomach, and lungs, and finally, the heart.

“You’re used to this,” I remarked.

“Well, yeah. And if you dawdle here, the meat won’t taste as good.”

“I see.”

Though I didn’t quite understand the intricacies of her logic, I did prefer to have better-tasting meat, so I left everything to Samya. We threw out all the other organs as a meal for the wolves, then dug a hole with my knife and buried the heart. Doing so allowed us to return the soul to the forest, and hopefully it would give birth to a new life.

After swiftly removing the organs, we just needed to drag the deer to the lake, and then our task for today would be complete. We pulled the deer down from the tree branch where it hung and started to move it to our destination. A while later, we approached the lake that I visited every morning. *This takes a bit of muscle and willpower. Though we usually have a lot of people out hunting, I didn’t think it’d be this tiring.* Once the lake came into view, we both hastened

our steps and plunged the tree deer into the lake.

I sighed, slumping my shoulders, and said, “Do you travel this distance every time?”

“Yeah.”

“What did you do before the others came to live with us?”

“Just nabbed my prey near the lake. I’ve got a few hunting spots.”

“Makes sense.”

“Though, it’s easier to find game in the place we went to today. Since you were with me, I thought we’d have no problems dragging out anything we might kill.”

I wasn’t sure whether to call her shrewd or cheeky. Either way, I guessed that one needed to be calculating to live in this forest.

“All that’s left is...” Samya trailed off. She was about to say something but stopped herself, and I knew that she’d let something slip.

Unable to help myself, I decided to tease her a bit. “Is...what? What’s left?”

“Nothing! Come on, let’s eat!”

“Ugh.”

The answer I received was accompanied by a punch to the side. I rubbed at the now aching spot, following Samya, who was walking near the lake. I’d been nervous while hunting and too busy to notice while dragging away the deer, but I now realized that the sun was past its peak.

“Now that you mention it, I’m getting really hungry,” I said.

“Right? We couldn’t eat back there, so let’s go somewhere else.”

“Okay.”

She walked ahead, and I did my best to keep up. We eventually arrived at an area a ways away from the submerged deer—at this distance, we could barely see it. Here, we decided to sit down.

Samya volunteered to gather the firewood, perhaps worried about my body

since I hadn't done hard exercise in a while. While she was doing so, I collected some nearby rocks to construct a small firepit. It wasn't elaborate—I just placed the stones on the ground in a ring, but the diameter was large enough to allow a small pot of water to boil over the fire. Once the pit was finished, I submerged the pot in the lake and drew up some water. Lunch today was sweet and salty stewed meat with unleavened bread, but we would have to wait a bit longer before we could eat.

While I was making the necessary preparations, Samya returned from collecting the kindling.

"Is this good enough?" she asked.

"Yeah. Should be enough to boil a pot of this size."

After I inserted the kindling into the pit, I used my magic to start a fire. As the first wisps of flame started to peek through the branches, I added more wood to make it grow. Once the fire was crackling vigorously, I placed the pot over it. I hadn't used this pot for very long, but it was nonetheless dark with soot, like a hardened soldier who'd battled through tough times.

The water heated, closing in on a boil. Every now and then, the flames would lick the sides of the pot, giving it even more of an old-fashioned appearance.

"We can now easily go to the city thanks to Krul, but when it was just the two of us, we had to walk while lugging the items on our backs," I murmured, staring at the fire.

Samya nodded. "Mm-hmm. We used to take small breaks along the way."

"Yeah, I remember. And also..."

It hadn't been that long ago, but it was easy to get carried away when reminiscing about the past. So easy, in fact, that I almost let most of the water boil out of the pot. Hastily, I removed it from the flames and added some herbs—Lidy had eagerly prepared them for us, her eyes sparkling. Though it looked a bit rough around the edges, this was our herbal tea. *Apparently. Or at least, that's what Lidy said.*

After taking out lunch and pouring the herbal tea into our cups, we put our hands together and said, "*Itadakimasu.*"

I first took a sip of the tea. It exuded a faint earthy aroma mixed with some sweetness, and there was a hint of acidity to it. After I swallowed, my body felt slightly refreshed.

“This is nice,” I said.

Samya nodded and took a sip. “Delicious.” Afterward, she proceeded to stuff her cheeks with her lunch. “This is good too,” she said with a grin.

In terms of etiquette, her lack of manners was improper, but no one was here to reprimand her.

“I’m glad to hear that,” I replied. “Don’t eat too quickly though, okay?”

“I know.”

We hadn’t packed a big lunch, and since we were both famished, we polished off our food in seconds.

I put out the flames in the firepit, then turned to Samya. “All right. Now we just need to go back.” Samya looked a little down. *Well, I guess I’ll give her some more time.* “But if we go back right away, we’ll only get bored... Why don’t we pick some fruit on the way?”

“Okay!” she exclaimed with a beaming smile.

I wasn’t sure if we were just lucky or if our success was due to Samya being all fired up, but we managed to pick quite a bit of fruit. We even found something we hadn’t seen before—it resembled a pomegranate. Samya said it should be safe to eat, so I tore off two kernels and popped them into my mouth.

“A bit astringent, maybe.”

“But good, right?” she asked.

“Yeah.”

Amidst the astringency, I detected some sweetness and tartness. *Delicious.* The flavor reminded me of my childhood in my previous world. Pomegranates had grown around my home, and as a kid, I’d often snatched a few off trees to enjoy.

The fruits and vegetables of this world were native, undomesticated, and

wild, and thus tasted more bitter and sour than what I'd eaten back on Earth. I hadn't been in this world for a full year yet, but I'd been eating these types of fruits for quite some time, so I was used to their taste. Even so, I couldn't deny feeling a bit relieved when I ate something that tasted closer to home. Perhaps my scent or my face had made my satisfaction apparent since Samya grinned at me.

"You seem pretty happy, Eizo."

"You think so?"

I can't deny that I'm a bit happy. I tousled Samya's hair. She pouted for a second before she narrowed her eyes. *A bit like a cat...*

And so, Samya and I made our way home.

"We're back," we called out to the cabin.

"Welcome home."

When I opened the door, Rike and Lidy were in the living room. Samya immediately ran to her room. *We moved around a lot today, so maybe she wants to wash up.*

"Where are the other three?" I asked.

"In the back training and looking after Krul and Lucy," Rike replied.

I smiled. "They're energetic. And what are you two doing?"

"Practicing magic. You can see mine pretty well now."

Rike was puffing out her chest with pride, which was an unusual gesture for her. *Hm. Seems like she might surpass me soon.*

"I'm not sure if it's because she's a dwarf, but Rike has some talent," Lidy added. "At this rate, she may be able to use simple spells."

"Wait, really?" I asked.

"Yeah."

She gave a firm nod, and Rike, who sat next to Lidy, seemed even more surprised than I did. Perhaps the dwarf had never been told that it was possible.

“It’ll be pretty useful if you’re able to use magic to ignite a fire,” I said. I used fire magic quite a bit myself since it was a bit of a pain to stoke flames from nothing. It made a huge difference if one had basically a lighter on hand.

“If I learn that, I can light the forge,” Rike said.

I nodded. “That’s right.”

In our workshop, the forges, firebeds, and stoves could maintain the flames if lit by a spell. Of course, one could light a fire the normal way, but our tools performed better with magic.

“It’ll be useful if I can do the same work in the same way, even when you’re not here. Right, Boss?”

“And I won’t have to worry about whether or not you’re able to work properly,” I replied with a smile.

I wanted to avoid a situation where smithing had to be halted while I was away. Although I had my cheat abilities, I couldn’t know when and where I’d close the curtains on my second life. Should the worst happen, I wanted to maintain the forge so they could use it if they wished. Though, in that situation, I wasn’t sure if they would all remain here.

“I-I’ll do my best,” Rike said firmly, steeling her resolve.

I wasn’t sure if she knew my thoughts, but she was certainly raring to learn.

That night, while we were eating dinner, the next person in line for their “day with Eizo” was announced.

“Next up is Rike,” Diana declared.

“All right. So...is the order going to be based on when each person arrived here?” I asked. I didn’t really care who was going next, but I could be better prepared if I knew the order in advance.

I hadn’t been sure whether Diana would be willing to spill the beans on this question, but she didn’t seem to mind.

“That’s right,” she answered.

“Then next up after Rike...would be you.”

“Wrong.”

“Huh? But... Ah, I see.”

The order of arrival had been Samya, Rike, Diana, Lidy, Helen, and Anne, with Krul and Lucy joining us in between.

“It’s Helen,” I said.

Helen’s shoulders jolted. *Why’s she so shocked if the order’s already decided?*

“I’m surprised you remembered,” Diana said.

“Well, she did technically come first.” While Helen had come to live here full-time much later, she’d arrived before Diana with her request for custom dual blades.

“I guess the cat’s out of the bag,” Diana chirped, giving a wink.

It sounded like she’d be next in line after Helen. I had no idea what they would ask of me, but I just shrugged, ladling another helping of soup into my bowl.

Chapter 4: The Lightning Strike's Armor

At Forge Eizo, we had no fixed holidays or time off. We just took a day off if we were free or tired. If anyone asked for a vacation day (unless we were completely slammed by deadlines), we'd usually make it a holiday.

And in general, we weren't pressured by delivery dates. We didn't have busy seasons, and Camilo had said, "I'll just sell what you make. Whether a lot or a little, it doesn't matter to me." Even if I only gave him a single knife, he probably wouldn't have any major complaints, though he might grumble about it.

In other words, we could take a day off anytime we wished, but no one had really requested one. Samya had asked once or twice in the past, but that was it.

Two weeks had now passed since I'd been notified about my day with Rike. I'd spent my time fulfilling orders, dragging back the food we'd hunted, tending to the fields, and making small items.

While I'd been hesitating on when to call for a day off, half a month had passed. *I might be a coward, but I don't want to rush Rike and have her forcibly spend a day with me...* And so, another week had started. After I finished my work, someone approached—Helen.

"Got a minute?" she asked.

"Sure."

"I have a favor to ask."

"What is it?" I wiped the sweat from my skin with a towel. "I'll entertain most anything."

A member of my household had just asked me for a favor. Unless it put myself or any other family members in danger, I was sure I could fulfill her request. *At least, I think.*

“Uh,” she began. “Well, I want you to make me some armor.”

“Armor?”

Helen had lost her armor during the ordeal with the empire and the subsequent revolution. Anne had returned Helen’s dual blades to the cabin, but she hadn’t brought any armor. When I’d asked Anne about it later, she’d said she didn’t know. Helen’s old armor had been nothing special, so it might have been discarded.

“Are you planning to return to the mercenary life?” I asked.

“Nah.”

“Really?”

She nodded.

After a brief silence, she spoke again. “It’s not odd for mercenaries to go missing at any time in our line of work...but it’s been quite a while since I left my company. I wanted to let a few people know that I’m okay.”

“I see.”

She felt it unsafe to go see them without armor, only carrying her swords. That’s understandable.

“Want me to get all fired up and make a full set of plate armor?” I asked.

“I won’t be able to work if I wear all that. Oh, but if you could lend me Krul for the trip, you won’t have to make anything.”

I shook my head. “That, I can’t do. Her mom would be devastated.” By “mom,” I of course meant Diana.

Helen and I both laughed for a moment.

“So what do you want then?” I asked. “If you really want a set of full plate, I don’t mind.”

Armor like that would require quite a bit of work, and I couldn’t readily make multiples. That’s why I hadn’t planned on tackling that project anytime soon. However, since the request was coming from a family member, everything was out the window. I didn’t even mind crafting tiny mechanisms for the helmet.

“Let’s see...” With a serious expression, Helen put her hand on her chin. Even if she were to return to mercenary work, she’d need to travel long distances, and weighty armor wasn’t ideal.

“Could you make a breastplate, some vambraces, and shin guards, maybe?”

“What parts of your body do you want protected?” I asked.

“My chest, my arms, and my shins, I guess.”

“Okay. What about your abdomen?”

“My abdomen, huh...?”

She once again mulled it over and then looked up, possibly imagining a scenario where she’d need that sort of armor. Her abdomen hadn’t been covered with steel before. Mobility was her primary concern, and she was probably the type that thought, “If it doesn’t hit me, I should be fine.”

“Yeah, I don’t need to cover my abdomen,” Helen decided. “It can cover just my chest, like Diana’s armor does.”

“Okay. Do you want to cover your entire chest, or just your left side like before?”

“Entire, please. That armor originally covered my whole chest, but it broke off at some point and the left side was all I could salvage. I just kept using it because I liked it.”

“That so?”

“Yeah.”

It felt like I’d just heard a secret story of the Lightning Strike—I’d never known the reasoning behind her choice of armor.

There was only one thing left to do now, but it was the biggest challenge yet. I didn’t mind completing this part of the process, but since there were other options, I was hesitant to do it myself.

“I’ll let Rike take your measurements,” I said. That was the best solution for this huge problem...but when I suggested that, I was met with a strong punch to my shoulder.

By using my cheat abilities and infusing magical essence into the metal, I could make the steel tougher than normal. This strength also allowed me to create sharper knives and shortswords with higher endurance. Armor certainly prioritized this hardness as well. However, since steel would become brittle if it was *too* hard, it also required some flexibility.

###

The day following Helen's request, I immediately got to work. I was practically done with my goods for Camilo's delivery, so I could spare two or three days to work on other items.

"What do you want to do, Rike?" I asked.

"Please allow me to watch."

She didn't have any rush work either. Because of this, I honestly wouldn't mind if she requested a day off, but I decided to keep quiet about that.

"Oh, could you take Helen's measurements for me?"

"I can do that."

Helen and Rike went inside the house, and they beckoned for Anne to join them. *Well, it makes no sense for them to take measurements here...* I guessed Anne was there to help—Helen was tall, and we needed someone equally tall for support. Rike's dwarven stature was significantly more petite, but I'd asked her because she knew how to take measurements.

Meanwhile, I decided to prepare a sheet of metal. The sheet was pretty large, but not nearly enough to make a breastplate, and it was rectangular. I'd need to heat and layer two sheets, then hammer them on the anvil. They didn't have to fit together perfectly, so I hammered away without using any borax.

After I flattened the metal to about twice its original size, I used a chisel to make some creases, then started to fold. The resulting folded metal was now much thicker, and I added an additional sheet of metal on top. I repeated the process of annealing, hammering, and folding the metal. Once I finished turning it over a few times, it'd become a chunk of steel, and it was time to lengthen it.

Just then, Helen and the others returned. *I didn't think they needed to*

measure much, but I guess it took quite a bit of time.

Though we rarely used it, we had a bit of paper and some writing utensils for these occasions. I could certainly use my cheat ability to eyeball her measurements, but I wanted to keep records—better to claim that I'd made these items after measuring.

Rike handed me a slip of paper with a couple of numbers written on it. The units of measurement were slightly different between the kingdom and the empire, but since our rulers were manufactured in the kingdom, I guessed that these numbers followed our system.

I used my installed knowledge and my cheat abilities to double-check, but they seemed accurate. After glancing at the paper once more, I removed the chunk of steel that'd been heating up nicely in the firebed.

From here, I needed to forge the shape. Some breastplates were divided down the center of the chest while others were one solid piece. This time, I was making the former. And for the chestpiece to fulfill its role as armor, it needed to be thick in the center and thinner on the edges.

I first hammered and stretched out my clump of steel on a regular anvil. When it was about four centimeters thick, I started to strike precisely. I planned for it to be about two to three centimeters thick in the middle and a hair thinner toward the ends. The metal would thin a bit when I started to shape it, so I kept that in mind.

Just as I was about to form the breast area, it was time for lunch, so I took a break from work.

"How is it going, Boss?" Rike asked as I stepped out of the workshop.

"Well, it's just steel, so no major issues. Changing the thickness wasn't as difficult as I expected, but I might have a bit of trouble when forming the chest area," I replied honestly.

I'd changed the thickness of the steel, but only that—it was still just a plate. I hadn't really done anything difficult. Rike didn't ask any further questions, and I figured my answers were probably exactly what she'd imagined.

To create curves on the breastplate, I couldn't use a normal anvil. So, I

brought out a small, round anvil from the corner of my workshop, one that I didn't normally get to use. I set it down next to my usual one.

Positioning the steel plate, I aligned the place where I wanted the curve, then hammered the metal as though I was enveloping the anvil. I had to move the area little by little so as to not actually create a sphere. I continued to swing my hammer, making sharp clangs as I poured in magical energy. Red-hot sparks danced in the air.

The steel plate seemed to answer my requests—it very gradually formed a desirable shape. I continued to hit the sheet, creating two round, triangular forms. I'd need to then quench and temper the metal, just like I did with weapons. Armor also required the sturdiness and ductility that those steps provided.

However, before that, I had one more thing to do. While I was preparing a sheet of metal for the backplate, the breastplate had cooled, so I beckoned Helen over. She approached me while wiping the sweat from her forehead.

"What's up?" she asked.

"There's still a bit more to go, but I wanted you to check the fit."

I handed her the breastplate, and she fitted it to her chest.

"I need to line the insides and tighten it with a leather belt, so keep that in mind when you're wearing it."

"Okay," she said.

With the breastplate still on her, Helen twisted her body and bent down. It didn't seem too bad from my point of view, and there were often times when slightly oversized armor fit better. Ultimately, I had to entrust the feeling to the user. The armor didn't have to be perfect; it just needed to be easy for the wearer to use. That was the most important and vital condition it had to fulfill.

"How is it?" I asked.

"Yeah, it fits well. Doesn't feel weird to move around in either."

"I'll finish it up then."

"Okay."

I set the breastplate off to the side and proceeded to work on the backplate. The day ended just as I'd finished giving it a rough shape. I'd save the rest for tomorrow.

###

The next day, I entered my workshop to finish up the backplate. I'd already shaped it from a sheet of metal, so I was used to the process already.

"Helen, sorry, but can I touch your back for a bit?"

"Huh?" Helen asked.

Everyone looked up at me in shock. *Crap, I didn't explain myself.*

"Sorry, what I mean to say is... Look, I know your size, but I need to understand how to shape the backplate," I fumbled.

"Oh..."

Everyone seemed to understand my intentions. I was just doing my job! This was all part of my work! I would've hesitated to touch her chest, even if I *had* received her permission, but I hoped she'd give me consent for her back. Helen's cheeks flushed as she shyly turned away from me. I took this as permission and reached out my arms.

"Excuse me," I said.

I felt like gingerly touching her would have the opposite of a calming effect, so I just went for it without hesitation. Even from above her clothes, I could feel her sturdy yet elegant muscles. *Well, she's been sparring with Diana almost every day.*

"Could you curl your back next?" I asked.

"Like this?" She leaned over, and her spine took on a convex shape.

"Yep."

I felt the plane of her back like this, and it was indeed different from when she was fully upright.

"Thanks. That's all."

"You're fine with just that?" Helen asked.

“Yeah. You were a huge help. Thank you.”

After examining her back, I thought it best to leave a little extra room in the backplate. I quickly took the sheet of metal from the firebed, wanting to form the shape while it was still etched in my memory.

I used the smaller round anvil to sculpt it, making sure to imbue the steel with magical energy. The sheet of metal slowly changed its form and turned into armor that could protect Helen’s back. While I was waiting for it to cool, I heated up the breastplate in the firebed. It was now time to quench it.

I waited for the breastplate to get hotter, then immediately submerged it in a vat of water. Steam rose in the air with a loud sizzle, increasing the temperature of the workshop. I was drenched in sweat, and even my cheat abilities couldn’t help me with that. *Wish I had an air conditioner...* It might’ve been useless given the heat, but if it helped even the slightest bit, I’d be tempted to install one.

By the time I pulled the breastplate out of the water, it’d hardened. The surface was still rough, so I used rasps to smooth it out until the steel took on a silver glimmer. Now, I only needed to temper the metal and increase its flexibility.

“Helen,” I called out. I wasn’t going to confirm sizes this time around.

“Hm?”

“Do you hate the color gold?”

“Not really.”

“Okay.”

After I received confirmation, I placed the breastplate back into the firebed. This time, I didn’t wait for it to glow red hot—I was careful to keep it below a certain temperature.

When steel was heated in an area with oxygen, its surface would oxidize and rust (though it wasn’t what one usually thought of as rust), creating an oxide film. This made it more difficult for traditional rust and corrosion to occur. Depending on the thickness, the reflection of light would intervene, casting it in a different color. At the end of the heating process, I called over Rike and

showed her the firebed.

“Here.” I pointed. “This is the temperature you want it to be. Have a good look.”

“Got it.”

When I took the breastplate from the firebed, it had a gold sheen.

“Whoa!” Rike said in surprise as she stared at the golden plate.

Everyone looked up when they heard her voice, and the room was suddenly filled with expressions of wonder.

“Wow!” Amongst everyone, Helen seemed to be the most excited. It was only natural since this was her armor, but she seemed to genuinely enjoy the color.

“I want to do this for the other pieces as well, but is that all right with you?” I asked her.

“Of course it is!” Helen shouted, making the workshop tremble.

When I saw her in such elation, I knew that my efforts were worth it. If possible, I wanted to add other colors to make a sort of pattern, but she’d already stand out with this golden color, and I didn’t want her to be too conspicuous. It would apparently impact her social status as well.

“So that’s how you add color,” Anne mused, sounding genuinely impressed.

“Have you seen it before?” I asked.

“I’ve never seen the process of it...but as a princess growing up in the palace, I saw a lot of items with all sorts of decorations.”

“Huh, I’m a bit curious. Might be nice to see those.”

“Oh? The empire will always welcome you.”

“I’ll have to turn down that offer.”

Any knight who appeared at the empire’s palace was of high rank—I was a mere blacksmith. Though I wasn’t sure of the details, I guessed there’d be famous knights occasionally present, perhaps from the kingdom or other republic nations. The armor worn by these knights wasn’t just normal and high-polished; each and every one of them must’ve been adorned with luxurious

decorations that were suitable for their status. These ornaments implied that time and money had gone into making the armor. And, if these knights could afford that, it meant they had a source of income—land they controlled. In other words, they commanded a high social status. It was probably vital to show off one's standing within the palace.

Likewise, it was important that a soldier could be identified simply by their armor. One could bring back excellent results on the battlefield, but if people had no idea who they were, their efforts would be in vain. Take, for example, the monster subjugation campaign: if the names of our soldiers had not been noted in the records (an unlikely scenario considering that Miss Frederica had been there), then a fighter in stylized armor would stand a better chance of being identified. Someone retelling the story of a battle might say, "I couldn't see the soldier's crest, but the large lion decoration on the helm means it must've been Lord So-and-so."

With that in mind, I thought it was important for armor to have some kind of ornamentation, though it didn't have to be gold. Whether a soldier would make it home safe was a separate issue—good results from the war zone would always incur greater rewards.

And so, I decided to timidly ask Helen if she wanted something.

"Hey."

"Hm?" she replied.

"Should I add, like...a wolf decoration or something?"

She rejected my offer sternly and instantaneously. "I don't need it!" She then quickly added, "I know what you're thinking, and I'm grateful for your consideration, but my strong point is my speed. I don't want unnecessary ornaments weighing me down."

Hm, guess it was completely unnecessary. I suppose I can't create something hefty and slow down the Lightning Strike—that would be disrespectful to her nickname. I'd been careful to make the backplate as light as possible, but if I added ornaments, I'd be mistaking the means for the end.

"Okay. I'll just add the same color to the rest of the armor then."

“Thanks!” she replied with a wide smile.

As everyone else returned to their work, I knew that I should as well. I made the vambraces and shin guards—these went faster than the breastplate since they didn’t have a complex shape and only had a limited range of motion.

And with that, I’d made a set of gold armor. However, I still wasn’t completely finished. I had to cover the insides with glue and paste in some fabric. Another layer of glue was added on top of the cloth, and I applied deerskin atop that. The brims were fastened with gold rivets.

I heard that people generally wore a special garment under armor during battle, but I made it so that Helen could wear this chestpiece on top of her normal clothes during travel—her old armor had been similar. The breastplate and backplate would be connected with belts around her shoulders and armpits. Metallic fittings for the belt were similar to the ones on the breastplate, so they would get the black rust and oxide film treatment too. It’d be meaningless if the fittings rusted and the belt went loose. After all, both the breastplate and the shin guards were stabilized by the belt.

After four days, I was done. I wondered how long it’d take if I attempted to forge a full-body set of armor. In my case, I felt like the time and effort needed wasn’t worth the profit. I could make many more swords and knives in the same amount of time.

As I voiced my complaints to Rike, she casually said, “Just ask for more money.”

“You think I should?”

“It’s not odd for a craftsman to request more money for more time spent working. You don’t seem to want that though, Boss.”

“Ugh... I’m reflecting on my actions.”

I more or less always requested payment based on the quality of the item that I made. In my previous life, I’d had to properly calculate the time I worked on quotes and orders—with those numbers, I’d been able to bill accordingly. But in this world, I was making what I wanted and doing what I loved. I just couldn’t get used to adding time consumption to my payment requests. *I should*

improve on that, a little at a time.

The armor was now finished, so I had Helen try it on. It was currently way past noon but a bit before sunset—there was plenty of time before the sky would start to take on an orange hue.

“Try and see if you can put it on by yourself,” I said.

“All right,” Helen replied. She’d never fully worn this armor before, but she skillfully strapped each part to her body. Once she was wrapped in gold, the Lightning Strike appeared before me.

“How is it?”

“I don’t feel any discomfort. It won’t be much of a hassle to wear either.”

“I see.”

She bent down and twisted her body to check her range of motion. If she was able to move around this much in comfort, there wouldn’t be an issue. I breathed a sigh of relief.

“Hey,” she said suddenly.

She looked at me head-on, eyes filled with determination. I felt a little intimidated, though her words were something I had expected to hear one day.

“Could we battle a bit? Just to try it out?”

“Battle...*me*?” I pointed to myself, and Helen gave a firm nod. She wasn’t fooling around.

“I’m just a blacksmith.”

“Quit your joking,” she replied with a frown.

Everyone around me started to nod. *Wait, no.* I wanted to correct these opinions that differed from my own, but they had the overwhelming majority, and I couldn’t say anything more. I wasn’t willing to fight a losing battle.

“Well, if you really want me to... I guess I don’t need to say that bit, huh.” Helen kept her eyes fixed on me, and I sighed. “All right.”

“Nice! That’s the spirit!”

She slapped my back hard enough for the sound to echo throughout the workshop and then raced outside.

“H-Hey, what about the wooden swords?” I called out.

But she was already gone. I sighed once more and grabbed three wooden swords. Two of them belonged to Helen, and the third one was Diana’s.

“I’m used to that one, so don’t break it,” Diana cautioned.

“With how Helen’s currently acting, I can offer no guarantees. But if it breaks, I’ll make you a new one.”

“Sure. Have at it.”

She gently patted my shoulders and sent me off. I wasn’t eager to do this, but since I was going to, I figured I might as well do my best.

Once outside, I found Helen rolling her shoulders. *If she can move that much, she should be nimble in a fight too.* Krul and Lucy came out as well; everyone else followed behind. In the end, our entire family had gathered at the clearing in front of our house.

Everyone kept their distance, but Lucy, the youngest, looked at me with twinkling eyes and a furiously wagging tail. It was almost like she was asking, “What are we all doing?”

“It’s dangerous, so step back,” I warned.

Lucy, who was probably already used to the sight after watching Diana’s training, gave a loud bark and ran toward Diana. I couldn’t suppress a smile.

“All righty!” Helen exclaimed. “Let’s begin, shall we?”

She’d already finished stretching and was holding her wooden swords. To me, she looked like a wolf about to nab her prey.

“Go easy on me,” I requested.

“Now you really must be joking.”

We knocked our swords together in ceremony and then stepped back from one another, gaining a bit of distance. At once, tension spread throughout the area. I felt even the wind die down. I knew that if I moved even a millimeter,

this equilibrium would be broken.

We stood still as time passed. Every minute felt like an hour. Then, all at once, I thought I felt a small gust of wind.

Helen appeared right in front of me. I hastily swung my sword.

CRACK! I managed to just barely parry Helen's sword, which I'd been following outside my line of sight. Had I reacted even a moment later, the first blow would've been hers. But of course, Helen's barrage didn't end. Once she knew that her first attack had been blocked, she swiftly whipped out her other blade. I desperately blocked her onslaught, strikes that came one after another. Perhaps because she was using two swords, her movements weren't small—it looked as though she was dancing. Her swordwork must've been beautiful when seen from the sidelines.

Because we were using wooden swords, even if she got me good, I would probably end up with just a fracture, though a broken cervical spine or skull could be more fatal. But shortswords were another story—even if I tried to fight with my own, against Helen, I'd be sliced up in an instant. The mere thought made me shudder, and I broke out in a cold sweat.

I stood in a fighting stance, waiting for the perfect opportunity, and finally launched my own offensive. Had I been against a regular soldier, I might've been able to take them out, but Helen effortlessly parried my attacks, aiming for the openings I made when I swung my sword.

"Ugh!" I grunted.

I tried to gain some distance and regain my posture, but the Lightning Strike was fast. In an instant, she closed the gap, and I continued to be on the defensive. The dull clacking sounds of the wooden swords reverberated in the air as I continued to block and parry.

I could no longer attack like I had before. She had no openings I could take advantage of, and at this rate, I would gradually lose the battle. It felt like a lot of time had passed. Had it been fifteen minutes? Thirty? I wasn't used to this and couldn't keep track—I was running out of stamina. Though I was younger than I had been on Earth, I was still thirty and past my peak. I didn't have the unlimited stamina I'd had in my twenties. *No, I definitely don't have as much as*

I once did.

At any rate, if I kept this up, I'd just use up all my energy and fall to the ground. So, I chose an alternate route—I reared back, using up all my strength to deliver a final blow.

Needless to say, it wasn't enough to take Helen down. I felt a strong impact on my jaw before my consciousness faded to black.

I stirred awake.

When I did, I realized that I was on the ground. Something soft rested against my head. *What was I doing again?* Slowly, I cracked open my eyes and saw Helen's face right in front of me. She looked teary.

Right. I was in a battle with Helen, testing out her armor...

"He's awake!!!" Helen yelled.

Everyone gathered around.

"Are you okay?" Diana asked, peering at me worriedly. The rest of my family wore similar expressions.

"Yeah," I replied. "My jaw hurts a bit, but I'm fine everywhere else."

They all breathed a collective sigh of relief. Krul and Lucy started licking my face. By now, I'd finally realized where I was—Helen was in front of me, and everyone else was staring down at me from a short distance away.

This means...

"Whoa!" I cried out hastily. "S-Sorry!"

I immediately tried to get up—apparently, I'd been using Helen's lap as my pillow—but my efforts to move were in vain. Helen and Diana used quite a bit of their strength to push me back down while Samya, Anne, and even Krul watched on. *I feel like you guys could restrain an ogre with this strength.*

"You might be fine," Diana said, "but you should rest a bit more just in case."

I decided to obediently follow her orders, though I was extremely embarrassed by my position.

"Well, it's a total loss for me!" I declared brightly, still lying down. Though I'd

guarded myself against most of Helen's attacks, I hadn't been able to display any offense. *My defeat was only a matter of time...*

"You really are so strong," I said with a grin.

I reached out to touch her face, and she squeezed my hand tightly. She smiled back as though to say I was only stating the obvious.

"Honestly...I didn't expect anyone to last so long against the Lightning Strike," Anne murmured, gazing at me with obvious surprise.

"Was the battle really that long?"

My memory was hazy. Our battle had felt so brief, yet so long. Helen was also tilting her head to one side in confusion, and I guessed that she and I shared this sentiment.

"It lasted around thirty minutes," Rike said. Apparently, she'd already gotten used to everything—she didn't look at all shocked. *Which...is also a problem...*

"Thirty minutes, huh?"

"Yep."

And still, Helen didn't seem exhausted. I, on the other hand, had only been able to strike back twice. Our battle was definitive proof of her swordsmanship, and it also proved another thing...

"I guess the armor fits you perfectly," I said.

"Huh? Y-Yeah. Of course," Helen replied. "I've never had anything better."

"I see. That's great."

If she could move around with gusto for thirty minutes, it meant that the trial had been a huge success. The armor's endurance probably didn't need to be tested; after all, I'd forged it the same way I would a sturdy sword.

"The gold from your armor glittered magnificently. You looked like a real bolt of lightning." Lidy described the scene with her eyes closed. Was she trying to remember what she'd seen?

Anne gave a dry smile. "But it was so fast that I could barely see what was going on."

“I could keep up, but only barely,” Samya added with a pout. It seemed that even a beastfolk had hardly followed the fight.

Personally, I was most shocked by the combat abilities gifted by the Watchdog. They...were a bit too convenient, really. *I don't need to fight off or win against a bear. I just need to survive long enough to escape (perhaps with a pretty bad injury). And in fact, that had indeed happened.*

Also, only women seemed to come into my household—I couldn't help but feel suspicious of the Watchdog's intentions on that front.

Well, I had no way to confirm the truth, so there was no use in getting worried. I let out a big sigh, expelling my negative thoughts.

“This...might not get an answer,” Anne said gingerly, “but can I ask you something, Eizo?”

“Sure. I'll provide any information I can.”

She still seemed a bit hesitant. *Is the question that difficult for her to ask?*

“Just who *are* you?”

Who am I? I wasn't sure if I knew the true answer to that question. If I were to respond to her words at face value, then I would say I was a man reincarnated with cheat abilities. But that wasn't all, and in the end, I could only supply one answer.

“I'm just a blacksmith.”

“There's no way that's true,” Diana and Anne said, simultaneously rejecting me.

I stood up, and Helen looked worried. “A-Are you all right?”

In a humorous, exaggerated motion, I slumped my shoulders. “I'm not so weak that you put me out of commission with that attack.”

I wasn't sure if the Watchdog had given me some advantage, or if I'd just gotten lucky, but my jaw hurt a bit and nothing more. If I had to guess, I'd say I was likely suffering from a mild concussion. In my previous world, I might've gone to a hospital just to be safe—a CT scan or an MRI would show any real problems—but in this world, I could only rely on my instincts. I didn't want to

end up getting a craniotomy or something.

Helen nodded at my assurance. "All right."

"Thanks for worrying about me," I said, petting her head.

"S-Sure."

She turned away to hide her embarrassment. I offered her a strained smile and then turned to everyone else.

"I'm sorry to trouble you all. Thanks." I bowed my head.

"Don't mention it," came the reply.

"So, when are you leaving to meet up with your company?" I asked, turning to Helen once more.

"Tomorrow."

"That's quick! Wait... I guess it's probably best to act swiftly."

"That's what I thought too."

The worried expression on her face had drifted, indicating that her thoughts were focused elsewhere. Her eyes harbored a firm resolve, and she nodded.

It was now Diana's turn to look a bit anxious. "Will you be okay?" she asked Helen.

"Yeah. I've got weapons and armor by my side, all made by Eizo. Nothing too bad will happen."

"I guess so."

"Hey," I interjected quickly. "Yeah, I made your gear, but that doesn't mean you can block an attack from a dragon or something. Don't push yourself."

"I know," Helen replied, her posture slumping.

My only wish was for her to return safely.

That night, dinner was a bit more grand than usual, but I didn't host a going-away or farewell party. I would've done so if Helen was returning to the mercenary life, but she'd promised to be gone for a week at most. I considered

borrowing a spy from the margrave to shadow her—I was sure he’d understand my situation and would lend me someone—but, I decided to trust her since I doubted anything dangerous would occur.

“Do you have a lot of friends?” Diana asked.

“Hm, I’m not sure if I could call them *friends*, but yeah, I’ve got quite a few comrades.”

Rike chimed in next. “I’ve never asked—what kind of work did you usually do?”

“Mostly patrolling. Sometimes I’d need to defeat a monster, and every once in a while, I did some exploration.”

“When a larger monster has to be taken out, the army should be called upon,” said Anne.

“Yeah. They’d occasionally ask me to do stuff like that, but not often.”

“Why only occasionally?” Samya asked.

“The kingdom has a reputation to uphold,” Anne answered. “If a mercenary happened to take all the glory, it’d be a troublesome mess for the public officials to clean up.”

“Huh.”

Anne was a pro when it came to political affairs—after all, she *was* still a princess.

“Do you have any interesting stories?”

Helen nodded eagerly. “Oh, I’ve got a real good one. This happened a while ago, but...”

She told the tale, and dinner ended with our spirits as lively as ever.

###

The next morning, we decided to see Helen off on our way to Camilo’s. As we were packing our wares onto the cart, I noticed something.

“We made quite a bit this time,” I murmured, impressed.

Diana looked pleased. “We did, didn’t we?”

Truly, we’d forged a lot more than I’d anticipated, which showed just how skilled everyone had become. I was proud of their hard work, and I tousled Diana’s hair.

Once we were done piling our wares onto the cart, Lucy jumped up to sit amongst the cargo. We all followed the pup, and once everyone was seated, Rike grabbed the reins. Krul let out a joyful cry, and the cart lurched forward.

Sunlight peeked through the foliage, and the wind felt nice against my skin. It was the perfect day for an outing. Other animals of the forest were out and about, seemingly enjoying the beautiful day with us. From afar, I saw deer nibbling on the leaves of low-hanging branches, and a rabbit suddenly popped out in front of us, shocking everyone (including the rabbit). The day was surprisingly calm—time idly passed, and after a while, we came upon the familiar road to the city.

“Take care,” I said to Helen.

“Yeah. Thanks, Eizo.” she replied, jumping off the cart.

We were heading in opposite directions—she was going to the capital, while we’d be traveling to the city. As we went our separate ways, those of us in the cart called out to her loudly.

“Bye! See you later!”

Helen turned around with a wide smile and waved her hands. She yelled back in a voice just as loud as ours, “I’ll be off!”

Chapter 5: The Client and the Rings

After we parted ways with Helen, Krul pulled the wagon straight to the city. The road was as peaceful as usual. I'd heard that bandits were rather rampant, but luckily, we'd never run into any.

"How's the crime rate in the empire?" I asked Anne. When I'd infiltrated the empire to rescue Helen, it hadn't seemed too bad. However, when Anne looked at me blankly, I quickly clarified. "I mean, normally. I know there's currently some unrest."

It'd only been a short while since the whole incident in the empire, so it wasn't odd that there was still confusion within the capital city.

"As far as I've heard, it's not that different from the kingdom," Anne replied. "If the sentry chiefs are concealing something, I haven't got a clue...but I doubt they'd tell such a silly lie in front of my father. The capital didn't seem much different from usual either."

"Yeah." I nodded. "I didn't get assaulted or anything when I was walking down the streets."

"Exactly." She sounded a bit proud—I supposed it was only natural for her to feel good when her country was praised. "But why do you ask?"

"Well, it depends on how Helen and Krul fare, but I thought it'd be nice if we could go on a short trip to the empire or the republic."

Generally, we only ventured to the city and back; very rarely would we make it out to the capital. Work back at the forge, as well as the limitations of Krul's food supply, had kept us from traveling very far. In fact, we hadn't even fully explored the Black Forest. I planned to do that first, but I also wanted to be exposed to the cultures of different nations.

"The republic..." Anne murmured. She seemed deep in thought.

Out of our group, only Diana and Anne were knowledgeable about the other nations—both of them came from noble families, so it wasn't odd for them to

welcome foreigners.

“Is there a problem with the republic?” I asked.

“None at all,” Anne replied. “I’m just not a fan of them.”

“Really?”

“Their attitude really irks me.”

If representatives from the republic had met with Anne, then I was positive they’d been aristocrats, not everyday folk. Regardless of their status, I was a bit awed by their courage—it took guts to display a bad attitude in front of a princess.

“Well, if you say that, then we can start with the empire.”

She looked surprised for a moment, but then she smiled. “Sure.”

When we arrived at the city, some familiar guards were on duty. We all gave our greetings as usual, then passed through, proceeding into the throng on the bustling streets. All around us, I could only see peacefulness. Crime surely occurred somewhere behind the scenes, but it didn’t seem to have an outward effect. I internally paid my respects to the guards who were keeping the city safe.

After navigating through the streets, we reached Camilo’s store. As usual, we stored our cart in the warehouse and walked Krul and Lucy to the back entrance. We left them under the care of the apprentice, then headed to the conference room. I knew the store quite well by now, but things seemed a bit more hectic than usual. Apparently, they’d just received a large order, and I feared that we’d come at a bad time. Despite the ruckus, they were still considerate of us—Camilo and the head clerk came out almost immediately.

“Sorry to barge in when you guys look so busy,” I said.

“Hm? Ah, we’re fine, don’t worry about it,” Camilo grinned at me and stroked his beard.

He’s hiding something.

“Do you need your usual supplies?” he asked.

“Yeah. Just wanted your assistance. I’m lacking...”

Once I told them what I needed, the head clerk nodded and left. We were now done with eighty percent of our negotiations—these visits usually ended with some small talk.

“Hey, where’s Helen?” Camilo asked.

“Oh, she went to the capital,” I replied. “She wanted to check on her company and report to her friends that she’s safe.”

“Makes sense. Even after we came back, she couldn’t let her guard down until *that* day.” He was referring to the day when the emperor had declared that he’d no longer hunt Helen. Camilo soon remembered Anne’s presence and hastily added, “Of course, I don’t think ill of you, Your Highness.”

Anne smiled. “I’m fine. Don’t you worry about me.”

I didn’t know her true thoughts, but I did feel a little nervous.

Camilo seemed to feel the same because he was breaking out in a cold sweat. He turned to me and swiftly switched topics. “Anyway, I want to ask you about something.”

Guess I’ll humor him this time. “What’s up? Another big order?”

“No, nothing like that.”

“You seem busy, so that’s what I assumed. I’m willing to listen to a majority of your requests.”

“Well, it is a *bit* related. Give me a second.”

Camilo left the room. While he was gone, we speculated about what he could be up to. A short while later, he returned.

“This time around, my client specifically requested you,” he said.

“You know that I only accept these requests with my usual condition attached,” I replied.

“I know, but just hear me out first. You can decide after.”

It wasn’t worth it to make a fuss before I knew what was going on, so I simply nodded and fell silent.

“We’ll reveal the client first.” Camilo turned to face the door. “All right, you can come in now!”

A slender man with blond hair and blue eyes entered the room. Diana and I were shocked—our eyes grew wide. It was a man we both knew very well: Marius Eimoor.

“Long time no see,” he said casually as he made his entrance.

Come on now.

“So, are *you* the client?” I asked.

He nodded. “That’s right.”

“Does it have anything to do with how busy this store currently is?”

“It does.” He gave a second nod.

I couldn’t see anything that tied these two factors together. I peered at him, bemused.

“I do think I should’ve told you this earlier,” Marius started, commanding the room to go silent. I felt like I could hear Diana’s heartbeat. “I’m getting married soon.”

“Huh?”

Under normal circumstances, my first words should’ve been, “Congratulations!” but Diana and I were too stunned—we had no idea how to react and just froze completely. Marius didn’t seem to mind.

“There were talks about this before,” he continued, “but I didn’t mention them because I thought things would happen later on, sometime in the future. However, matters proceeded rather swiftly. Camilo and I have been absolutely preoccupied with preparations and the like. Today, I’d planned on ditching—I mean, *confirming* the item that I want procured... And then, you coincidentally dropped by, so I thought this was the perfect opportunity.”

“R-Right.” That was all I could say. I couldn’t even muster the cheek to point out his slip of the tongue.

“I want you to make me rings, Eizo.”

Even in this world, rings were often worn as accessories, and according to my installed knowledge, wedding rings were a tradition here too. There were so many things I wanted to ask, but the rings were at the heart of this conversation.

Rings, huh? I was positive that my smithing cheat abilities would apply, but I wasn't sure whether my production abilities would also kick in. I also had a stipulation for all custom work—the person asking for the commission had to travel alone to our forge in the forest. Though, admittedly, I only created this rule so that I didn't sell extremely dangerous high-quality weapons to just anyone.

Even if I made an accessory of the highest quality—one that wouldn't break even if struck by an axe—I wouldn't be causing trouble for anyone, and it certainly wouldn't change the world. And this time, my client was a friend. If I could do something to celebrate his wedding, I would.

"I can probably exclude you from my condition since you aren't asking for a weapon," I conceded. "So, what kind of rings do you want?" I didn't expect him to request steel rings. I was certain that he would want a precious metal, and what was most important was how I could process it.

"Her side of the family are all enthusiastic...and I received a small amount of meghizium. Enough for two rings."

Meghizium... It was a type of gold-colored metal found in this world. Normally, it was soft enough to knead with your fingers. However, if it was processed properly, it would attain a tough composition that was peerless. The processing step was extremely tricky. A countless number of blacksmiths in the past had attempted to do it, but I'd heard that almost none had been successful in creating even a ring.

This metal was scarce, rare, and unique—it was gold that could change its shape at will. All of this grabbed people's curiosity, causing the cost to skyrocket. One could trade a small bit of meghizium for a castle with guards and a period of included maintenance. When looking at it purely from a value standpoint, there was no better present to give.

"Did her family gift you meghizium knowing that it's not suited for rings?" I

asked.

Since it was so difficult to process, it was normally kept in its soft form. Meghizium was considered unsuitable for rings, much less for important pieces like wedding rings. I doubted that anyone would consider using this metal for that purpose.

“Well, you see...” Marius murmured. He glanced up. I saw only a normal ceiling, but apparently, he’d seen the vision of somebody’s face there. He let out a loud sigh. “Her family...is the margrave’s. I believe you know him well.”

It was my turn to sigh. *I may be a bit vain for thinking this, but meghizium was probably chosen because the margrave knew that I would be the one completing the request.*

“I see. Is that why you suddenly decided to marry even though you were planning to idly wait a while?” I asked.

“Well, it’s one reason. A big one.”

The margrave—a person Marius was indebted to—was trying to move plans along. And Marius, who held the position of Count Eimoor, couldn’t offer any resistance. When thinking about the future, he had no excuse, no reason to refuse.

“So, when do you need them by? Don’t tell me next week.”

“I know I’ve made you listen to a lot of unreasonable requests, but I wouldn’t do *that* to you.”

Marius’s shoulders slumped. When I’d dropped by to deliver my wares last time, there’d been no evidence of all this fuss. So, I surmised that this situation had escalated within the last two weeks. Though the marriage was indeed being rushed, it seemed that preparations didn’t need to be made immediately—the ceremony wouldn’t be held, for example, a week from today. No, he’d been given more than three weeks.

“We will be wed at the end of next month,” Marius said.

“And you want them done before then.”

He nodded. Still, this implied that he had to prepare everything within a

month and a half—the margrave most likely had his own reasons for rushing things. My guess was that the royal palace may have been involved, but I didn't try to pry further.

In the end, I relented. “Fine. I guess I'll do it.”

“Sorry about this. And thank you.”

My friend extended his hand, and I reached out to shake it.

“W-W-Waiiit one sec!” Diana suddenly cried out as we tried to finish the deal. It seemed that she was finally able to speak. “There are so many things I want to ask you...but who is it? A relative of the margrave?”

“It's Julie from Viscount Derangère,” Marius replied.

“Ah, Julie. I see.”

“You know her?” I asked.

Diana nodded. “I do.”

“The Eimoors and the Derangères have known each other since way back,” Marius explained. “Julie's the eldest daughter of that house. I think she's sixteen.”

“She's young,” I replied.

“Everyone's young from your point of view, Eizo.”

“That's true. Wait, how old are you, Marius?”

“Twenty-three.”

“You're young!”

I knew he was younger than me, but his composed demeanor made him seem a lot older. *Wait, in this world, twenty-three's pretty old. Is he just acting his age? The margrave seems older than his late forties, so maybe he sees Marius as his son.*

“How old did you think I was?” Marius asked.

“Maybe a little younger than me.”

“It's not that different then, is it?”

“From my point of view, it kind of is.”

I felt like people changed drastically every three years until their twenties. And since I was internally forty, this felt especially true.

“A wife seven years younger than you, huh...” I muttered.

“An age gap doesn’t mean much between aristocrats. How many years apart are Viscount Diewald and his wife?” Marius asked.

“Twenty-five years,” Diana replied.

I felt myself raise an eyebrow. *That’s...quite an age gap.*

“Right, right,” Marius said. “And until they wed, he didn’t seem like he’d marry *anytime* soon. Everyone was wondering what he’d do, but then he suddenly brought home a twenty-year-old wife from the house of a baron. There were even rumors that he forced himself on her.”

“Good grief...”

I could understand everyone’s bewilderment, but I felt bad when I thought about the trouble this must’ve caused the viscount.

“In the end, I heard they actually met at a banquet and fell in love after that,” Diana said.

“How romantic.” Anne sighed, looking spellbound.

“Yeah, I heard they were making their love story into a play.”

Aristocratic ladies like Diana and Anne seemed to be enamored with romantic themes. *I’ll consider buying them some romantic novels if I see any in the capital.*

“And Julie has always loved books since she was little, so she often came by to read ours,” Diana said with a grin, speaking to Marius. “She seemed to like you, and you treated her well, didn’t you? She’s cute. I think it’s fine.”

“Yeah. If it wasn’t Julie, I might’ve declined,” he admitted.

“Oh? Since when did *this* happen?”

“That’s a secret. But I’ll tell you this—it’s been quite some time.”

“What? Come on, tell me! Did you fall for her when we all went on that long trip? Or was it during the banquet at Baron Schmieder’s?”

“You can mull over it all you like at home.”

“You’re so stingy!”

“I’m a count. I become a little stingy all the time when I think about my land.”

Marius laughed loudly while Diana puffed out her cheeks and pouted. This must’ve been a daily occurrence at the Eimoor residence. *I bet they had a lively household.* I felt sympathy regarding the incident that had broken apart their family, but in truth, I wouldn’t be sitting here if it hadn’t happened. *I’m not even sure what the best outcome would’ve been.*

“As your friend, I think that if you can create a peaceful household, that’s good enough,” I told him.

Marius gave me a look. “I could say the same to you.”

“Well...”

I knew what he was getting at, but I just wasn’t interested in marrying yet. Before I knew it, everyone in the room, including Marius, was staring at me.

“W-Well, since we’re done with our business, I guess we should head on home!” I exclaimed in an exaggerated manner. Everyone gave a loud sigh.

Suddenly, Rike spoke in an icy tone. “Boss.”

“Y-Yeah?” I’d never heard her sound so cold before—it made me shudder.

“Aren’t you forgetting something important?”

“Am I?”

What could it be? I thought I’d asked everything I needed to. I tilted my head to the side in confusion.

Rike sighed. “We can’t make the rings unless we know the width of their fingers. We can measure Marius’s fingers now, but we’ve got to think about his fiancée too, don’t we?”

“Oh.”

I'd been so shocked about the marriage that I'd completely forgotten. Since meghizium would become incredibly hard after processing, it would be difficult for us to simply forge a larger size and shrink it down later. Though, if that *had* been a necessity, I was confident I could hide the seams.

I looked over at Marius, who was grinning from ear to ear. "I was wondering when you'd ask me that. It's a good thing you've got an excellent apprentice, Eizo."

"Ugh..." I couldn't give a rebuttal, so I suppressed all my emotions and asked, "Well, what's your size?"

"Don't worry, I've brought all the information you'll need."

He rustled around in his pocket and plucked out two rings. *The larger one must be Marius's.* It was a silver-colored metal band with a simple design. *It doesn't have a blue luster, so it doesn't seem to be mithril... I bet it's pure silver.* A tiny red jewel was slotted inside, and there were no engravings. By the standards of my previous world, these would've sufficed as wedding rings.

"Since there's only a short time before the wedding, these are mostly just for show...but they're necessary," Marius explained. "The jewel inside is the bare minimum of extravagance usually seen on these kinds of rings, but they are indeed from Julie and me."

"Engagement rings," I supplied.

He nodded. They would indeed give us precise measurements.

"We had them on until this morning. I was planning on having Camilo ask you for the commission, so I took mine off when I received Julie's ring."

"I see. Then I guess we'll note the sizes."

I borrowed some paper and writing instruments from Camilo, who was grinning just as wide as Marius, and wrote down their ring sizes.

"We should be good now," I said. "This worked out well, didn't it, Marius?"

"What do you mean?"

"You're leaving today, aren't you? You two can wear your matching rings again."

I gave a teasing smirk, trying to exact my revenge, but Marius didn't seem bothered at all.

"You're right. Honestly, I didn't want us to wear these rings for too long. After all, they're just for show, but Julie's taken quite a liking to them." His words were sweeter than sugar.

I raised my hands in the air. "All right, I surrender."

Laughter filled the room, and I was ready to get going. *I don't think there's anything else I forgot.* Camilo took his leave, claiming to have other matters to attend to, while Marius and the rest of us walked out to the back to meet up with Krul and Lucy.

We headed to our wagon, which was now filled with charcoal, ore, and food. Then just as we were about to depart, the head clerk suddenly appeared. He brought out a metal box that was tightly secured with a chain and a lock.

"Is this it?" I asked.

Marius nodded. "Yeah."

"It looks well secured."

"Of course. It contains something expensive and rare."

"I probably shouldn't ask how many gold coins that box is worth," I said with a dry chuckle.

"No, you shouldn't." Marius laughed with me as he handed me the key.

"All right then. I'll be back in two weeks at the latest, whether I'm done with the rings or not."

"Got it."

We all piled into the cart, waving at Marius and the apprentice who stayed to see us off. Finally, we departed from Camilo's store.

I'd been requested to forge a precious item, one that symbolized my friend's lifelong commitment to his partner. I was determined to give it my all. I wasn't sure if I was imagining things or if Krul had noticed my tenacity, but I felt her stride become stronger than before.

The first thing I did once we arrived home was cut Krul loose. When I removed the harness, she shook her entire body, looking a little reluctant.

“Woof!” Lucy barked, approaching her side.

Krul gently rubbed her face against Lucy, and the latter wagged her tail happily. I took in the wholesome scene while thinking that I needed to equip Krul with shoulder guards soon.

After, we started to unload the cargo.

I followed my usual routine and put almost all the items in the storehouse. Spices and seasonings were kept in the storage room in our cabin for easier access—it would be more convenient to restock the kitchen if they were close by. Finally, I took the chained metal box to my workshop.

Thanks to Krul’s swift cart-pulling, we’d finished the entire errand by lunch. The family spread a blanket out on the terrace and ate our meal on top of it, with Krul and Lucy by our side. Things were as lively as ever, but I felt a tinge of loneliness because Helen was absent.

Though she didn’t have any intention of returning to mercenary life right now, she could very well make that decision in the future. It was best to get used to this scene. Lucy, who’d apparently sensed my loneliness, sat on my lap (rather unusual for her) and demanded some meat.

“All right, here you are,” I said. *“You’re such a nice girl, aren’t you?”*

I gave her some unseasoned meat and petted her head. She wagged her tail. *I wonder if this is what it feels like to have a kid. For now, I don’t have any plans for that...* Krul saw the scene and stuck her head out toward me. I petted her as well.

“Kululu,” she trilled, licking my face.

“Hey, that tickles!” I cried.

Our daughters are so kind. I was distracted by those two when I noticed that everyone else had turned soft gazes toward me. I finished the rest of my soup, feeling somewhat shy.

Once we'd finished lunch, we all gathered at the workshop. On delivery days, everyone usually got free time, and we spent the afternoons doing what we liked. Today, however, we had an unusual guest to attend to.

"All right. Let's take a look."

I stuck the key inside the chain's lock and turned it until I heard a click—the entire contraption fell off. I was curious about the lock's mechanism, but I needed to explore the contents of the box first.

Slowly, I lifted the lid, and inside there was a small leather bag nestled inside some cotton. I reverently picked up the bag—something hefty weighed it down. Before I opened it, I clapped my hands together as I'd always done in front of the *kamidana*. I prayed for this work to be a success.

As everyone stared, I took the item from the bag. It was a lump of gold, and judging from just the weight, it looked like nothing more than that.

"Let's see..." I murmured.

I gently placed it on the anvil and pressed down with my hand. While there was some resistance, it soon indented in the shape of my finger. Gold was a soft metal, but with my hands alone, I could only scratch it, not mold it. Meghizium was obviously much softer. It was likely more malleable than gold as well—if memory served correctly, a single gram of gold could be stretched out to nearly three kilometers.

When I took the lump in my hand and squeezed, it conformed to the shape of my palm. *Completely useless*. It felt like a lump of clay—soft to the touch but with a smooth, metallic surface. It just seemed disjointed. Since I was now aware of its hardness, I allowed anyone who wanted to touch it to do so. *Which means, well, everyone*.

"Can something this soft really become hard and strong?" Samya asked as she kneaded the meghizium in her hand.

"That's what I've heard," I replied.

Apparently, normal gold would also get slightly harder when heated. But I'd been told that meghizium would surpass that, becoming impossibly tough and strong, so there must've been more to it than simply raising its temperature. If

it was that simple, any blacksmith could easily make anything they wanted—after all, a blacksmith’s first instinct would be to heat a metal.

“There’s no magical energy in it,” Rike said. She wasn’t kneading it as much as Samya had.

Lidy nodded in agreement from my side, backing up Rike’s statement.

“Which means that we might need to use some magic during the processing stage,” I concluded.

“Do you think *that’s* the reason behind its low success rate?” Diana asked.

I nodded. “Could be.”

If magic was involved, it made sense that only a select few blacksmiths would be successful at forging with meghizium. Some blacksmiths besides myself could use magical energy in their products. Rike had been learning from Lidy and had started to add a bit of magical energy to her work as well. Magic had also been essential when forging the precious sword from Lidy’s village.

“It’d be simple if that were the case,” I murmured.

If magical energy was all that was required, this would be an easy task. I’d just need to add my energy while making the rings. And though I’d never done it before, it was likely possible to *remove* magical energy as well—at least, as long as I used my cheat abilities. If that were the case, I could mold the meghizium however I wished.

“But if that was all it took, I’m sure there’d be a lot more successful cases,” Anne remarked.

“Right,” I said.

While there weren’t many blacksmiths who could use magic, there were far too few successfully processed meghizium pieces. I figured that there must be another factor involved, but I hadn’t the faintest clue what it could be.

“Let’s put that aside for now,” I suggested. “We can start working with it tomorrow.”

Everyone voiced their agreement—Rike especially seemed a bit excited. I placed the meghizium on the *kamidana*, and once I confirmed that everyone

had left, I shut the door to the workshop.

Right before I did, I thought I saw the meghizium glimmer ever so slightly.

Chapter 6: Meghizium

After we finished breakfast and our morning meeting, we stood in front of the *kamidana*, where the golden clump was enshrined. We bowed twice, clapped twice, then bowed once more. Today, I was going to start processing the meghizium.

The others were tasked with creating sheet metal as usual, but Rike wasn't just going to watch me today—she'd help me try to find a way to make the meghizium harder. For now, I had no idea where to even start.

I used my magic to ignite the flames of the forge and the firebed. Once the flames started roaring, the room started to grow warmer.

"Speaking of, it's almost summer," I said, gazing outside toward the open window. A warm breeze wafted through.

Samya nodded. As a longtime resident of the forest, she would know best. "Yeah. The rainy season's over, so it'll get hot soon."

"When I lived in the capital, it didn't get that warm, but I wonder if it'll get hot here," said Diana.

"Hmm, I don't know anything about the capital. Not enough to compare temperatures."

"I guess not. Well, whatever happens, happens," Diana replied with a shrug.

This was going to be tough for me—to make it through Japan's hot summers, I'd lived with bedding made from cooling material, fans, air conditioners, and other technological advancements. But this world had none of that. *Can't I just find a dragon that breathes ice or something?* I shook my head to clear myself of all foolish thoughts, then focused my concentration on the meghizium.

"I guess I'll start by adding magical energy."

"Right," Rike said with a nod. "Let's see how hard it'll get."

Since it was so soft, I was tempted to just rip a piece off, but I took a chisel

and carefully removed a small chunk. This bit was just for practice. I hammered away, infusing magic as I went, like I'd normally do with steel. But when I did so, I was met with an odd sensation: it wasn't soft like I'd felt with my chisel, but it wasn't tough either. I couldn't quite tell what this consistency was.

"This feels...gross." I murmured. That was the only word I could think of to describe it. The metal was unlike anything I'd experienced before, and I wanted it to feel either soft or hard so that I could get a better idea of its limits.

Due to its ductility, I managed to hammer out a small, thin, golden sheet. I pinched the meghizium between my fingers and placed it on my palm, staring intently.

"It's...not filled with magic," I muttered. To my eyes, magical energy looked like small particles of glimmering light, but none of that could be found in my palm.

"Can you see any, Rike?"

She shook her head. "I cannot."

Hm... So I'm not just missing something. Just in case, I decided to consult an expert.

"Lidy, can I ask for your opinion?" I called.

She immediately stopped what she was doing and jogged over to me.

"Sorry to bother you while you're working."

"No, it's fine. What's the matter?"

"Can you take a look at this?" I stuck out my palm containing the meghizium. She narrowed her eyes.

"There is no magic present," she said.

"I knew it."

"I'm sure you wouldn't make this mistake...but you didn't forget to infuse it, did you?"

"No way."

"I thought not."

I entrusted Rike with the meghizium, grabbed a random sheet of steel, and hammered, drawing my magic down into the metal. With every swing I took, I could detect glittering particles. I couldn't see much because the sheet wasn't heated through, but there was more than enough for confirmation. I held the steel up to show Lidy.

"How does it look?" I asked.

"I can see magical energy," she replied.

"Right..."

Lidy returned to her work, and I racked my brain. Both mithril and appoitakara did not readily accept magic, but it certainly wasn't impossible to add some. Meghizium, however, was completely different; I didn't feel an ounce of magic within it. Rike was scrutinizing the thin piece of metal.

"So, we know that it's soft without magical energy. Does that mean it'll harden if I can find a way to imbue it?" I wondered.

"Makes sense," Rike said.

"But I have no idea how to go about doing that."

"Me neither."

We looked at each other and sighed. *To put a positive spin on it...*

"This work will be a bit of a challenge."

I must've been smiling because Rike spoke wearily, though with a hint of admiration. "You seem like you're having fun, Boss."

"Challenges are worth overcoming, y'know?"

"You're right."

Instead of sighing this time, I gave a smile. I was determined to master processing the meghizium.

"Now then, how shall I go about this?"

Even in my previous world, I had a habit of talking to myself when I was in a bit of a bind—I felt like it helped me solve problems. It was similar to rubber duck debugging, where a programmer would talk to a rubber duck and

articulate their problem.

“Should we heat it up?” Rike suggested.

“Yeah, worth a shot.”

I placed the metal into a crucible in case it melted, then used my tongs to set it into the firebed. Once I confirmed that the meghizium was well heated, I turned the crucible over onto the anvil.

I’d assumed that it would melt and drip out of the container, but the small ball of meghizium simply rolled onto the anvil, looking exactly as it had before being heated.

“Does this thing not even want to melt?” I asked.

It doesn’t want to get harder or softer. What a selfish little thing. Before it completely cooled, I tried hammering it again, but I felt the same odd sensation.

“Seems like heating hasn’t made a difference.”

The metal changed its shape every time I hit it, but that wasn’t anything new. I continued to hammer until it completely cooled down, but it remained the same. When I touched it, the meghizium was as squishy as usual. *No good.*

“Well, if heating doesn’t help, why don’t we try cooling?” I suggested.

“Cooling?” asked Rike.

“We can run it under water or wrap it in a damp cloth and swing it around.”

“I get the water, but will the damp cloth cool it enough?”

“Yeah.”

If a well-squeezed damp cloth was whirled around with intense speed, the vaporization would decrease the temperature. It wouldn’t make the metal ice-cold, but it was still worth doing. If cold meghizium could accept even a *little* magic, then we could think of a way to further cool it and infuse more.

I grabbed a random cloth, soaked it in water, wrung it out tightly, and wrapped it around the meghizium. Stepping outside so I wouldn’t damage anything indoors, I started swinging it around.

The cloth cut through the air with a whooshing sound while I fought back the

temptation to fling it across the yard.

“Might be cool to have another projectile weapon that isn’t a bow,” I muttered.

Bows were useful, but they couldn’t be used without arrows—they also required a certain degree of skill to master. Though, everyone in our family except Rike could use one, so it was easy to forget that last part. If I were to create a weapon other than a bow, it would definitely be for Rike—then she would at least have some kind of projectile weapon.

It’d be convenient to have, I concluded. Definitely worth exploring after I finish this current job. I continued to swing the cloth around.

“Is it getting a bit colder?” I asked.

“It feels like it,” replied Rike.

I poked the meghizium and felt its squishy yet cool texture. “We should hurry before it warms back up.”

“Right!”

We hastily returned to the workshop, placed the bit of metal onto the anvil, and I started hammering. It was as soft as usual, but I continued my strikes until it got warmer.

“No good, huh?” I grumbled.

“I wonder what triggers it,” Rike mused.

I kneaded the metal as we tried to think of a solution. It seemed like I had exhausted all of the obvious options. *Maybe I need to follow a certain process... Rapid cooling or rapid heating perhaps?*

“Let’s have lunch for now,” I said.

“Right.”

I prepared and ate my meal, but my mind was occupied with methods for adding magical energy to the meghizium. While I was deep in thought, Diana spoke, sounding a bit exasperated by my behavior.

“You really are a craftsman during times like these, Eizo.”

“Huh? Sorry, were you guys talking about something?” I asked.

“No, but it’s clear that you’re not mentally here right now.”

Everyone nodded along.

“Well, this item is for my friend’s marriage,” I said. “I wanna do a good job.”

Diana’s face grew red. *It is her older brother. It must bother her a little.*

“So, Eizo, did you find anything?” Samya asked, talking around the food in her mouth.

“Uh, for what it’s worth, I found that conventional methods don’t work against meghizium.”

“Samya, mind your manners,” Anne scolded. The role of etiquette tutor had been passed from Rike to Diana to Anne. Samya’s teachers were rising in rank—from commoner to aristocrat to princess. *Would she be able to attend a ball at the palace one day?*

“Anyway, I understand that I understand nothing at all,” I declared.

Samya swallowed her food and then nodded. “I see.”

“I wish there was some sort of hint or something...” I muttered around the wooden spoon in my mouth.

“Mind your manners too, Eizo,” Anne said.

“Whoops.” I removed the spoon and folded my arms in front of me.

“But what if...” Diana murmured. She must’ve unintentionally spoken aloud because her face grew red when everyone turned to her.

“What’s up?” I asked.

“Can you transfer magical energy from one item to another? You’re pulling power from the forest and putting it into your forging, aren’t you? So...can you infuse magic into steel and then transfer it over to meghizium?”

“Hm...” I’d never done that before—never even thought of it. As I forged, I simply hammered magical energy into whatever item needed it. But if this method were possible...then normal weapons could have energy transferred into them, even after the forging was complete. This would definitely have a

strengthening effect.

“It’s worth a shot,” I said.

Diana looked a bit happy at my response. I knew I had to strike while the iron was hot, so I immediately wrapped up my lunch and returned to the workshop.

“All right, let’s give it a go.”

I took out a sheet of steel, already infused with magic, and placed it atop the small, golden lump on the anvil. I swung my hammer down, hoping to transfer the magic from the sheet into the meghizium beneath it. Clangs rang in the air, but this was the sound of steel. After a few swings, I removed the steel and revealed a flat, golden sheet of meghizium underneath.

I narrowed my eyes and stared intently before looking at Lidy. She must’ve been having the same thoughts—we locked eyes, and she nodded.

“It’s only a bit,” I murmured, “but the magic’s there.”

“Which means...” Diana gingerly said.

“Yep.” I gave a firm nod. “This was a success.”

A loud cheer, warmer than the firebed and the forge, thundered across the workshop. We’d found a way to infuse meghizium with magical energy! But we needed to clear one more condition before we could proceed: does magic make meghizium harder? This problem hadn’t been solved yet. After all, I’d only managed to infuse a minuscule amount of energy.

I picked up the sheet of meghizium and kneaded it between my fingers, easily forming a small lump. There wasn’t enough magic inside to change its consistency. If I was able to discern that magical energy was connected to meghizium’s hardness, then I could steadily work toward my goal, but unfortunately, I wasn’t sure if that was true. Even so, I knew that I’d gotten closer to processing this metal.

“Thanks, Diana. I’m amazed you thought of this.” Without her, I would’ve never gotten to this point.

“With pleasure,” she replied, giving a wink.

I’ve thought this about Marius too...but pretty people look great when they’re

winking.

I turned back to the metal, refocusing on the task at hand. “Now then. How much magic will this little lump require?”

“It’d be troublesome if it needs a lot,” Rike said.

I nodded. For example, if I needed to repeat this process a hundred times to infuse even this small amount of meghizium, it would be a painstaking process. *But if that’s what it takes, then I gotta do it.* I put the little golden ball on the anvil, placed the magic-infused sheet of steel on top, and started pounding away with my hammer.

As I worked on the meghizium. I asked Rike to prepare more magical sheet metal. At first, I’d tried doing both steps at once—infusing the steel with energy and then hammering that magic into the meghizium. But even my cheat abilities didn’t allow me to do that. Ultimately, I needed Rike to keep providing me with steel filled with energy, almost like batteries.

“Sorry about this,” I said.

“I’ve told you many times before,” Rike said, her tone full of exaggerated faux-anger, “but one of an apprentice’s roles is to help their boss out. You usually do everything by yourself, though. I know it can’t be helped sometimes since only *you* can conduct certain tasks, but you should let us help when we can.”

The others in the workshop nodded along. Because most of my skill came from my cheats, I made a conscious effort to do whatever I could by myself. However, this tendency didn’t seem to go over well with my family. My morning water-fetching routine was also my time with Krul and Lucy, so I couldn’t allow the others to take over, but I had considered giving them some other odd jobs. *Maybe just little tasks from time to time...*

And so, I continued to transfer magical energy into the meghizium. Rike couldn’t infuse the steel with a *lot* of magic, but since we didn’t need to heat the sheets, she could just keep them coming, one after another, without having to pause and wait on the firebed. That was the only difference between this process and normal magical infusion.

After I depleted the steel sheets I'd personally infused, I moved on to using Rike's. And a little while after that, I began hearing an additional *clunk* after the usual *clank* of the sheet metal.

The sensation under my hammer felt just a tad different. I touched the meghizium.

Though it was very slight, I felt that the metal had become firmer. However, the change was truly minuscule—I figured that I could tell only because of my cheat abilities. I took the opportunity to roll up the thin meghizium, and then I began striking it once more.

Slowly but surely, the sound grew firmer. The *clunks* turned into *clinks*, chiming like the sound of a glass harp. After a few more hits, I clearly felt more resistance, so I kneaded the flattened meghizium with my fingertips.

It felt much stiffer than normal. Regular meghizium was as soft as paper clay, but the bit I was currently holding was like natural clay. Unfortunately, this meant that it was still easy to scratch and mold.

Before I knew it, the sky had turned orange. I held the hardened lump of meghizium up to the light of the setting sun, then narrowed my eyes.

Each metal had a limit on how much magical energy it could absorb. If the meghizium had hit this limit, then this was as firm as it would get by way of magical infusion. And if that were the case, then I'd need to find another method of hardening it. A troublesome task indeed, but I was prepared.

The gold lump, dyed orange from the sunset, was surrounded by glittering particles. I felt like it could still absorb more energy; however, I wanted some confirmation.

"Rike, Lidy," I called out. They quickly came over. "Lidy, could you take a look at the magic?"

She gazed at the lump from beside me, and after a brief moment, nodded. "There's quite a bit inside, but I don't believe it has hit its limit."

"Got it, thank you. Rike, could you check its firmness?"

"Okay." Rike solemnly took the lump from my hand. She used her small, firm

fingertips to knead the small bit of meghizium, skillfully sculpting an octahedron. “This has certainly gotten a lot tougher. There’s still a long way to go before it can become a passable ring, but I think we can start molding the general shape.”

“I see. Thanks.”

So, all I needed to do was continue to transfer energy into the metal. But...

“The issue is—how do I add magic while maintaining the shape of the ring?”

Rike and Lidy nodded. Though we had a few more problems to solve, none of us contained an ounce of pessimism.

It had been a smooth first day. At the very least, we now had a method by which to proceed, and this finding was more than satisfactory to me.

I wasn’t against the idea of mulling things over for a week and experimenting...but that was only if the work I was doing was of a personal nature. Since this was a request from a friend, the sooner I found a solution, the better. If something went terribly wrong at the last second, it would be unbearable. After all, this was an important item for my friend’s wedding; delays weren’t forgivable. A wedding with no rings would be horrendous.

I feel like Marius would laugh and forgive me anyway. But regardless, his position as an aristocrat would be questioned if such a blunder was made in front of everybody. I’m sure Marius is also aware of this fact. Maybe he just trusts me that much. Even if I’m assuming wrong, I’ll just keep on thinking that.

Dinner was the usual fried meat, soup, and unleavened bread. It was a bit too early to celebrate. Still, I seasoned the meat with berries and some wine—a small luxury indicating a small victory.

“Hey,” I said suddenly, gathering everyone’s attention. “Shouldn’t we prepare a wedding gift for them or something?”

“Hm... We normally should,” Diana replied.

“Thought so.” I gave a nod.

I wasn’t sure whether I’d get invited to the ceremony, but it was common

sense for me to prepare a gift for my friend's wedding. These rings were definitely part of it, but the material had been supplied at the requester's expense. I could've just made the labor costs free as a gift, but that didn't feel quite right—I wanted to give them a physical present.

"It depends on how my brother would invite you based on social positions," Diana explained. "Or, he might not."

"There's a decent chance I won't get invited, right?"

"Yes. In terms of rank, you're just a normal blacksmith. My brother and Julie don't care about that at all, but the rest of the aristocracy won't be so kind."

"Well, even if I don't get invited, I've got no intentions of cursing the bride."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, it's just an old fairy tale."

I think it was at a princess's christening. I briefly told them the most sensible version of the story—the Brothers Grimm version. Since a lot of people in this world could use magic, they found the story realistic.

"It's vexing that I can sort of understand the feeling of not getting invited," Anne said, sounding a little tired. "I'm not going to curse anyone, of course."

Those who could use magic in this world were generally aristocrats who received a proper education. These higher-ranked people would lose face if they weren't invited to joyous occasions. Were there any daring aristocrats out there brave enough to ignore the imperial family during important ceremonies? I wasn't sure, but if there were, people would see it as the imperial family losing power. In terms of governing, this would cause a ripple effect. A person in Anne's position would certainly find it problematic to not be invited. Of course, this didn't apply to the wedding of a count from a different nation.

I smiled and joked, "If you really do attempt to curse anyone, I'll stop you, so don't worry." *It's best to laugh these situations off before they get any more serious.*

Anne gave a small nod in response.

"In any case, an item to celebrate the couple..." I turned to Samya. "What

would you give as a blessing in this forest?”

Her cheeks were stuffed with food, and she swallowed before speaking. “Meat, usually. People who’re good at making alcohol would bring their special bottles. We’d just finish it all within the night though.”

“Huh. Sounds like fun.”

“I tagged along with my gramps when he had to go to events, and it was a blast.”

A large bonfire to grill meat or people celebrating around the fire... Either way, it seemed like an enjoyable occasion.

“While that *is* in character for our household, meat probably isn’t a good idea,” I conceded.

Diana nodded in agreement. “We aren’t just there for a playful visit, after all.”

“But it’s fine as a sort of casual gift or souvenir?”

“We’ve received deer meat before,” Anne chimed in. “It was caught in a forest somewhere.”

“I see.”

Well, if it was acceptable for the imperial family, then it was probably suitable as a gift for others. For now, we were eating all the meat we caught, but it seemed like a good idea to give some to Camilo and Marius in the future.

“Meat aside, we need a gift that shows who we are... Let’s see...” I mumbled.

“It should be something that only we can make,” Rike said.

“Right. Then I guess we’ve got it.”

Rike’s words had given me an idea. *A gift from us... It’s so obvious.* While everyone looked at me skeptically, I just told them that it was a secret and started to clean up our dinner table.

###

The next morning, after I fetched some water with Krul and Lucy, I prepared breakfast while everyone was getting ready. One question filled my mind: why couldn’t my cheat abilities inform me about how to handle meghizium? When I

swung my hammer down on the steel sheet, I knew where and how to hit it. My cheats allowed me to gain this extra insight, but they couldn't seem to tell me anything about the meghizium.

For a moment, I worried that I'd lost my cheat abilities, so before breakfast, I went to quickly check. I hammered at a sheet of steel in the workshop, and all went well, so I knew I still had them. This implied that there was another reason for my cheats' silence on the matter. For example, perhaps my cheats didn't activate if I couldn't directly process something—technically, indirect processing might count as “production-related” and my cheats in that regard were not as extensive.

My production abilities were better than an average person's, but that was it. For example, if I were to compete with Sandro in terms of cooking, I'd lose spectacularly. *I can imagine Pops yelling at me and going, “I'll hammer the basics into you!”*

In any case, if working with meghizium equated to production, I could see why my cheat abilities failed to activate. *It might be wise to take some time later on and find out what exactly engages my abilities.* I'd kept them a secret from my family, so I'd need to do any testing alongside my other work.

After breakfast, I prayed to the *kamidana*, then ignited the furnace and firebed. Forge Eizo was now open for business. Today, I requested that Rike finalize knives and longswords while the others created the base casts. The latter team was further divided into making molds and pouring in the molten steel.

As for me, I went straight back to the meghizium. I took a sheet of steel, put it atop my anvil, and infused my magical energy.

Glittering particles poured into the metal. I could easily tell what I needed to do next, proving that my cheat abilities were indeed working. The confirmation came as a relief, and I pushed the anxiety out of my head. Hammering away, I continued to silently add magic.

I created around five sheets, and though it looked like they had more magical energy than usual, *more* was never an issue. I took the small, slightly firm portion of meghizium that I'd hammered yesterday and added around two-

thirds of the remaining soft meghizium. Though one had some added magical energy, they were of the same material—I figured that if I could transfer energy from sheet metal into meghizium, I could also transfer energy from the harder to the softer meghizium.

Hammer away, fold it over, hammer again—I did this continuously, and after a while, all the meghizium was enveloped in some magical energy.

I realized then that I finally knew where to strike the meghizium. It was as I'd expected—my cheats likely only activated when I was directly processing an item. *I'm not sure just how many materials like this exist here. I'm in a different world after all...* If orichalcum, adamantite, or hihirokane required an intermediary item to transfer energy (just like meghizium did), then they would take considerable effort to work with. Luckily, meghizium only required these steel plates, but if orichalcum, for example, could only receive magical energy through mithril, I'd need to carefully determine the items needed for transferring.

For now, I could only pray that this wasn't the case, but it was still best to ask Camilo to obtain some of these items for me. Fortunately, I had some money to spare. *But I should focus on the meghizium today.*

"This is the hard part," I muttered.

I gently slapped my cheeks to amp myself up, then placed a sheet of metal on the meghizium and started hammering. I felt a *clang* of resistance, and I could see the magical energy from the steel plate transferring into the meghizium. I repeated this process multiple times and aimed for a hardness stable enough to allow me to finally forge the rings.

As I rolled the flattened meghizium back into a ball, I heard the rhythmical sound of another hammer alongside my own. Rike must've been making the knives.

Our rough and harmonious clangs continued until lunch, and afterward, I once again returned to the meghizium. My cheat abilities activated for my hammering, but I'd also gotten the hang of things, so my process now went a lot smoother. Once the sheet metal had fully transferred its energy, it was no longer surrounded by glittering particles—honestly, it looked a little lonely.

Even its color seemed a little worn and faded. *But I know I'm just imagining that.*

I took my time and transferred two plates' worth of magical energy into the small, golden lump. It felt a lot firmer now. I took the flattened bit of meghizium from under the sheet and kneaded it with my fingertips—it indeed was tougher to shape and squash.

It took a bit more effort to form the clump into a ball. Using my strength, I could barely squish it—the metal seemed about as tough as hard caramel squares. Caramel didn't exist in this world, though, so I couldn't accurately compare the two. *It'll be difficult to mold it if it gets any harder. It's probably best to at least create the shape of the rings now.* I went into the house and fetched the paper with the rings' measurements. *I should create a shape accordingly, but...*

"I should've done this when it was a bit softer," I mumbled.

It was tougher than I'd expected, and it took quite a bit of time to create a round shape with a hole in the middle. The process of transferring had gone so smoothly that I'd overdone it. *I should probably keep it to one sheet of metal when I start forging his wife's ring.*

In my previous world, there was an item called silver metal clay, which turned into silver after being heated, and I'd created rings out of it before. The ring in front of me felt like the metal clay before heating, and it was still far from finished. While I was gazing at the ring, I had another question.

"Right... Diana, Anne!" I called out.

They were right beside me, deburring a longsword—the hammers they were swinging had started to suit them.

The two ladies approached me, and Diana asked, "What is it?"

"Sorry to bother you," I replied. "I was wondering if there were any decorations that were required for wedding rings. These are for aristocrats, so if I don't follow a certain tradition and the bride and groom can't wear these daily, it'd be awful."

Before silver metal clay was heated, it would be given a rough design, which

was much easier to do while it was still soft. This applied to meghizium too; it was best to have a design first before it attained its famous toughness.

“I haven’t heard of anything,” said Diana, putting a hand on her chin. “Anne, what do you think?”

I wanted to believe that particular customs didn’t matter to the kingdom’s count, but it was possible that Diana had simply not heard of anything. I was also a little relieved that she’d taken the initiative and asked Anne. Of course, I didn’t dare vocalize this—in the worst case, I would receive a punch to the stomach.

“I haven’t heard of anything either,” Anne replied. “It’s not good for the ring to be too flashy, but that’s only because it’d be difficult to wear daily if it’s too luxurious.”

“I see.” Diana and I nodded in understanding.

So there were no restrictions regarding design. *But I’m sure we don’t want any unlucky motifs—nothing associated with death or something.* There also couldn’t be any designs that would make the rings difficult to wear every day, meaning that armor rings were also out of the question. Armor rings would honestly be perfect, since meghizium boasted its toughness—they were also rather fashionable, however, the design was completely unsuitable for wedding rings. I gave a dry laugh when I imagined a handsome man and his beautiful wife wearing matching armor rings. In my imagination, their clothes matched the rings, but as a former person from Earth, that felt a little too edgy.

“What’s wrong?” Diana asked.

“Nothing. Just laughing at how awful my ridiculous imagination is,” I replied honestly. “I thought that if I could use just the finger portion of a gauntlet as the ring, I’d be able to utilize meghizium’s hardness to its potential.”

“That’s a little...”

“Exactly.”

I agreed with her confidently, but I internally breathed a sigh of relief. I didn’t know what I’d do if she’d said, “That’s great! Let’s try that out!” Anne shook her head as well, and I stopped my stupid delusions.

“So should I just leave this ring blank or add a design to ward off bad luck?” I asked.

“I suppose a design would be nice.”

“Hm. Then I can add a pattern from the Nordic region right?”

“Of course.”

“Got it. Thanks, you two.”

“You’re welcome,” the two aristocrats said, gracefully bowing before returning to work. It was a little funny to watch the two perform elegant gestures before immediately taking up hammers.

Back to work—once I heard that I could add a pattern, adding a good luck engraving immediately crossed my mind. I wanted to add one or possibly mix multiple patterns to create an intricate ring.

So with that idea in mind, I stood up and went to grab a small chisel made for etching designs.

I used the smallest chisel we had to start engraving. The meghizium was still soft, and I didn’t need a hammer to insert my tool into the metal. I thought I could probably carve something with a knife, but as the rings were extremely small, it was best to use a tool suited for the job. I etched a *sayagata*, a diamond-shaped pattern of interlocking *manji*, which was a wish for prosperity and a long life. It represented perpetual timelessness, and I thought perpetuity was a perfect word for wedding rings. *I think it’s fine, but I’ll ask just in case.*

On a bit of paper, I drew the *sayagata* for everyone to see, but no one seemed to have an issue with the layered *manji*. My former world had suffered the effects of World War II, and thus a variation of *manji*—the swastika—had a global association with evil. This wasn’t just a single plain *manji* though, so I figured it would be fine, but if the pattern was connected with death in this world, I’d need to change it. I was told that there were no problems, so I went back to work.

If I exerted too much strength, I’d destroy the shape of the ring, so it was vital for me to be careful. I gently placed the chisel onto the ring and slowly carved out my design. I’d done some engravings in the past, but they’d been on

swords, which didn't require the same level of care and precision as this. I frantically tried to stop my fingertips from shaking as I worked. While I logically knew what to do, putting theory to practice was a completely different matter. However, this was a perfect chance for me to level up and improve my work. *Though I'm pretty sure this world doesn't have the concept of levels...*

It wasn't fun to always undertake easy work—sometimes it was worth it to toil or accept difficult jobs. *But if I were to constantly get tough requests, I know I'd quickly grow tired of them.*

Like an inchworm gradually making its way, I slowly moved my chisel. Since I was working with an expensive material, I pinched all the little scraps with my fingers and placed them into a small container. I'd originally bought this container to divvy up some of my spices, but it'd turned into a precious vase to store invaluable material, like a vial for pepper in the middle ages.

The scraps of meghizium would be used for Julie's ring. I'd been able to gather a fair amount, enough to fetch a solid price on the street. Even the tiny scrap I'd just pinched—the amount one might find on an ear pick after cleaning—was enough to comfortably live for a few weeks on the outskirts of the city. I couldn't throw out such an expensive material, much less consider stealing it. It was my desire to return everything that had been given to me. *I am certainly a troublesome craftsman.*

As evening rolled around, I finally finished my engraving. My eyes were tired and my hips were sore. Cheat abilities couldn't help me there. I stood up and stretched my back. Though I was thirty, I didn't hear any odd cracks—a possible benefit of becoming young again. I rubbed my eyes with my left hand and hit my hips with my right.

"You look like a grandpa," remarked Samya.

I was so wrapped up in my work that I'd failed to notice how everyone had already cleaned up. Diana and Anne had gone outside, grabbing their wooden swords in the process.

"Well, I *am* an old man," I replied honestly, forcing a smile. "My body's giving out."

I rolled my shoulders. My physical body was thirty years old, but internally, I

was forty. My mannerisms and habits as a middle-aged man wouldn't go away so easily. Because I'd been concentrating for a while, I didn't hear any cracks, but I could feel my body creaking.

Samya looked at me with surprise and a touch of indignation; she'd expected me to deny it. "Don't you sound so timid!" she exclaimed. "You've still got a long way to go!"

She slapped my back. It hurt, but it also gave me a surge of motivation.

"Right. I gotta work hard tomorrow too."

"Yep!" she cheered.

I tousled Samya's hair, and she gave me a broad smile.

###

"Hmmm, what should I do?" I murmured.

The following day, I finished my morning routine and lit the fires in the forge. Soon after, Rike found me standing in front of the ring, groaning.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"I was a bit careless. How do I make the meghizium harder when it's already ring-shaped?"

"Ah..."

It was indeed a conundrum. If I kept hammering magic into it like before, the ring I'd molded would be flattened, wiping away all my hard work. And if it became impossibly hard in that form, there'd be no going back—I would have made the world's strongest metallic sheet. Maybe that sort of thing would've been useful as a bulletproof vest in my previous world, but I'd been commissioned to make rings, not armor.

Should I have saved the shaping and carving until after I firmed up the metal a bit more? No—this was about as tough as meghizium could get before it became immutable. If the composition was any harder, I would've been unable to perfectly mask the seams. I thought that my cheat abilities might've been able to help, but I didn't want to gamble everything on that hunch and then falter. *If I fail, I won't be able to face Marius.*

“Maybe I’ll surround it with something,” I muttered.

“Like sheets of steel?” Rike asked.

“When I tried to hammer energy directly into the meghizium, I felt it flow inside...but the result was devoid of any magic. That means...”

“The magic’s just slipping through,” Rike finished.

I nodded.

“But then how did it transfer from the sheet of steel?” she asked.

“What if that sheet wasn’t the only thing infused with magical energy?”

“Ah!”

The meghizium had been sandwiched between the steel and the anvil. I’d never thought about it until now, but my anvil surely contained some magic.

I started with the assumption that power would seep out of meghizium’s surface area. So, when it was as thin as a sheet, pressed between two magic-filled items, the energy had barely any place to leak out from—the magic could only go up or down, but since it was pressed between imbued tools, the energy became trapped and had nowhere to go. My theory was that the golden sheet would absorb this trapped magic, resulting in a power-infused metal. If this were the case, then I could surround the ring with energy, trapping it within a highly condensed magical environment. And, if I was right, the power would be absorbed.

However, one question still remained.

“I can only hope that this method doesn’t create monsters.”

Monsters were sometimes born in areas where magical energy remained stagnant—I’d even fought a monster created by this phenomenon. At times, stagnant power could also transform a creature into a magical beast. Our baby wolf, Lucy (no longer much of a baby), was one such case.

Up until now, even if I used all my energy to create a custom piece, the magical energy flowed, never remaining stagnant. However, if I were to fill a small space with highly concentrated magic, I couldn’t be confident of the outcome.

Time to ask the expert.

“A monster?” Lidy asked.

“Yeah. I was thinking of making a hexagonal enclosure that would fill with magic as I hammered at the metal sheets. That small area would be thick with magical energy, right?”

“Ah, yeah, I’m sure that would be the case.”

“Right. And if that happens, I’m worried it might give birth to a monster or something.”

Lidy put her hand on her chin. “Let’s see...”

She was the best person to ask. After all, she was an elf well-versed in magic and also a former member of the monster subjugation campaign. Though Helen wasn’t around, the remaining family members were more than capable of taking down a monster. We could easily handle a goblin, and I couldn’t imagine a stronger monster appearing out of the small area of condensed energy needed for a ring.

Even if a monster is created, it won’t be too much of a hassle...but I would rather be well-prepared than scrambling around.

Lidy thought for a moment, then said, “I don’t think any monsters will appear. The magic needed to imbue a small metal ring is far too little for that.”

I breathed a sigh of relief. Even if we could deal with a monster, it was better if we didn’t have to. I thought about our little Lucy—if she hadn’t become a magical beast, she could’ve lived peacefully in a pack of forest wolves. Since I was now taking care of her, I was fully prepared to help her lead a happy life...but I would never know if she would’ve been better off with her own kind.

“But...” Lidy spoke up once more, and there was an air of disquiet surrounding her. “If the air becomes very dense with magical energy, there’s a chance that fairies might appear.”

“Fairies?”

She nodded. “They’re beings that use magic as their food source, so they’ll gather around pure energy or in areas thick with it. This place, even by the

standards of the Black Forest, is especially abundant with power, though it's not quite enough for fairies to appear. However..."

"If I add incredibly condensed magic to the mix, it's a different matter entirely."

She nodded again. "Right."

The others had reacted to the word "fairies." They all stopped what they were doing and listened in on our conversation.

"Can we talk with them?" I asked.

"According to folklore, some are apparently able to converse with humans, but a majority of the time, they'll just gather around, absorb all the magical energy, and leave."

"Do they do anything else, or play tricks on people?"

"No," she replied. "But the fairies that can communicate might play a few pranks."

"I see."

Are they similar to the ones in the fairy tales of my previous world? Those creatures seemed to vary greatly across stories and cultures though, so their behavior was hard to generalize.

"Well, I'll surround the meghizium with sheet metal, so I don't think they'll be able to grab the ring," I said. "I guess if fairies come, I'll get to see something rare."

Lidy smiled at me. "You're right."

Honestly, I'm kind of looking forward to the possibility of seeing a fairy.

Either way, I had to get back to work. I decided that I wouldn't need to prepare six sheets in a hexagonal shape because the ring was so small (though only time would tell if that was the right choice). So instead, I prepared three sheets of steel: one to put under the ring, one to put over it, and one to put around it. This last one would have a hole with a circumference just slightly larger than the ring, so the steel would be able to surround it snugly—it was also thicker and taller than the ring itself.

I didn't think there'd be any issues since I'd be hammering while everything was cool, but if there wasn't enough space between the plates and the ring, I could potentially end up distorting it. Regardless, I put my worries aside and prepared the steel.

Two plates, left cool, were infused with magical energy. I'd already gotten used to the process, and they filled with power rather quickly. I heated the third plate, then used the corner of the anvil to bore the initial hole. My hammer took care of the rest—I used it to widen the hole until it was the size of the ring.

Finally, the three plates, glittering with magical energy, were ready to be hammered.

"I need to test some things out one day," I mumbled to myself. "Maybe I'll have Rike hammer stuff like this."

I didn't expect to be overheard, but Rike's sharp ears picked up my words. "Can I?!"

"Hm, well, after this order's finished."

"Okay!"

"I know I'm the one who suggested it, but are you comfortable working with magical energy that you didn't create?"

"It's much easier to work with my own magic, of course, but I *do* want to test out hammering sheets of steel that have been imbued...and I can't *quite* do that yet."

"I see."

I guess if there's a better method available, it's normal to want to try it out. After all, if I was asked, "There's a piece of orichalcum loaded with magical energy—do you want to try hammering it?" I would jump at the offer without caring if I could process the metal or not.

If Rike could work with *my* magic in the steel, we could seriously up our efficiency and increase our mass production. I could just infuse steel with my energy without having to heat anything up. Rike might not be able to maintain every mote of magic, but if she could retain the majority of it, I could leave the

processing portion to her and focus on adding magic to metal. Then, once I'd prepared all that was needed, I could jump in and help, practically doubling our speed.

I didn't have a reason to refuse this opportunity. And if there was ever a time when I wasn't present, they'd be able to work in peace for a while as long as I left the sheets of metal. Ideally, I'd create infused sheets in my free time and keep them in storage.

My mind swirled with the possibilities. However, this all would have to wait until I created the rings.

I placed the sheets of metal and the ring on the anvil and swung my hammer down.

After a few strikes, I noticed that the sheet of steel on top was slowly losing its magical energy, proving that this method was working. I continued hammering, deciding that I would check on my progress right before lunch. If this wasn't going well, my morning work would all be for naught, but at least I'd still be catching my mistake early.

Around midday, I placed my hammer down and slowly raised the sheet metal on top. Glittering particles started flowing from the sides, like smoke emanating from a chunk of dry ice. Magical energy filled the area containing the ring. I completely removed the sheet and found, beneath it, the shimmering meghizium. I poked at it with my nail, feeling its hard surface. My cheat proclaimed that it had gotten unmistakably tougher compared to yesterday.

I gave a loud sigh of relief. I'd done it—I'd finally established the method. *The second ring should go a lot quicker because I'll just need to follow this same blueprint.*

Unfortunately, my relief didn't last for long. Within the empty loop of the ring, something strange had appeared—a tiny, transparent, blue jewel. I gingerly pinched it between my fingers in wonder. When I set it against the firebed, it gave off a faint purple glow, and I saw something flickering inside ever so slightly.

“Is this...?”

I'd gotten familiar with this feeling after our encounter with the demon, Nilda. She'd given me a red jewel as a reward, and I remembered seeing its insides waver. The stone I had this time was blue, but that seemed to be the only difference.

"Is this crystallized magic?"

Nilda had given me a gem of stagnant magical energy that had solidified. *Which means this is pure, crystallized magic...I think.* Since I was a complete amateur at stuff like this, I motioned for Lidy to come over. I'd been relying on her a lot recently.

She jogged toward me and asked, "What is it?"

"I want to ask about this." I placed the crystallized magic on my palm and held it up to her.

Her eyes grew wide. "Did this form while you were working on the ring?"

"Yeah. I remember receiving something similar from Nilda, and I wondered if this was the same thing."

"Pardon me."

She pinched the crystal and raised it toward the light.

"Wow..." Rike murmured, gazing up at it. She looked like a child being shown a precious treasure.

Even from the side, I could tell that light was flickering within the gem. It was so small that I was unable to ascertain whether the effect was similar to Nilda's magical jewelstone, or if it was because the firebed's flames were flickering. We also didn't have a magnifying glass to confirm anything. This world did have convex lenses, but they were made of either crystals or carefully polished glass. Concave lenses, on the other hand, hadn't made the rounds in this world just yet—unfortunately, that meant there was no way to correct nearsightedness. No telescopes either. I was sure that some had recognized the usefulness of concave lenses, but no one had put any to practical use just yet.

"This is, without a doubt, crystallized magical energy," Lidy declared. "I think we can categorize this as a magical jewelstone."

“Thought so,” I replied.

“But...”

She furrowed her brows. *Is something happening to the jewelstone?*

When she returned the small jewel to my palm, it quickly crumbled and disintegrated.

“Ah.”

“Unlike the red jewelstone, it seems that this one reverts back from its solid state after some time.”

“Guess I can’t make a killing with one hammer,” I muttered. “That would be too good to be true.”

“Indeed.”

“You can’t try to take the easy way out, Boss.”

Lidy and Rike chuckled, and I smiled back. Getting rich using this method had never crossed my mind.

“But, if certain conditions are met, perhaps you can make it stable and stagnant like the red jewelstone,” Lidy suggested.

“I wonder how you find that condition...” I mused. “Seems tough.”

“At the very least, I’ve never heard of creating a blue jewelstone using this method.”

“There’s no such legend among us dwarves either.”

“Hmmm...”

Another human, dwarf, or other species must’ve produced something like this in the past, but since it’d disappeared so quickly, they probably hadn’t found it worthwhile to keep records. For that same reason, I couldn’t even carry it around.

“Well, I’ll try to search for that condition later, when I’ve got the time.”

“That might be best,” Lidy said with a nod. She sounded a little reluctant to agree.

Just when I was thinking of getting back to work, I had an epiphany.

Wait a second.

“We couldn’t remove energy from the red jewelstone, right?” I asked.

Lidy nodded once more. “That’s right. The power had completely solidified.”

Since stagnant magical energy was hardened, it wouldn’t leak out or dissolve, but we also couldn’t remove any of it. And, since it didn’t crumble away and was known to be rare, it was valuable as a precious gem.

“But can we remove energy from the blue one that immediately crumbles?” I asked.

“There’s a possibility.”

Even if it disintegrated quickly... Next time I made a gem, I’d try it out inside the house, using an abundance of magical energy somewhere. And, if I could keep it crystallized for just a little longer, I could use one outside of the house. By doing this, I could perhaps use the stored magical energy elsewhere, like draining a battery.

I wonder... “Do you think it’s worth testing out?”

“It is!” Lidy replied energetically, grabbing onto my hand. I hadn’t seen her quite this eager since I’d repaired the sword from her village.

She quickly shrunk back. “Ah, s-sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it. If this goes well, we might be able to speed up our work—I can understand why this excites you. But before that...”

I picked up the meghizium ring with my left hand and gently flicked it with my right. A beautiful metallic noise rang out, proving that the metal couldn’t be easily chiseled anymore. I exhaled, truly glad that this experiment had gone well. Even if I’d been confident in my methods, I couldn’t actually know until I tested things.

“Seems like this one’s a success too.”

Rike offered a round of applause, praising me. Lidy followed suit, and everyone else joined in. Feeling a bit embarrassed, but also with a hint of pride,

I bowed my head.

After confirming that the ring had hardened, I decided to eat some lunch. Everyone was still working, so we finished our meal quickly, but the blue magical jewelstone was at the heart of our conversation.

Diana's eyes widened in surprise. "You can make something like that?!"

"I didn't do it intentionally," I replied. "It just sort of happened. But yeah, I did produce one."

"So that's what all the fuss was about," Samya said.

"Yeah."

I was a bit scared when I saw Anne's eyes twinkle.

"But," I added quickly, "it was unstable and quickly crumbled. The crystallized magical energy returned to its previous state, so I guess it's more apt to say that it disintegrated into the air."

Anne gave an exaggerated slump of her shoulders. In terms of national wealth, it'd be extremely useful if I could make something expensive out of nothing—that was exactly what the concept of alchemy was all about.

We were careful to not get too wrapped up in our conversation and we soon ended our lunch break. I returned to my workshop and placed the hardened ring within the confines of the metal sheets once more. Though I was only able to produce something similar to a magical jewelstone (and not an actual one), I decided to call this setup of stacked steel the "energy forge."

Well, "simple energy forge," since it's really an easy thing to make.

I placed the imbued steel on top of this simple forge and continued to hammer away. At this point, I was certain that magical energy would transfer to the meghizium ring.

Whenever I was directly infusing magic, I could more or less tell when an item had reached its limit of absorption. However, since the method for meghizium was indirect, I'd have to remove the ring from the simple energy forge to check it every now and then.

The meghizium felt the same, and just as before, it was shimmering. However, I could tell that the glittering particles around it had definitely increased.

“Hmmm...”

Is it hard enough already? I suppose this is the perfect time to test it out.

Rearing back, I hit the ring with my hammer. If it was still too soft, even a single hit would make that apparent...but a clear *clang* rang out like a wind chime. It didn't seem dented.

All right, I can do this. I struck the ring directly, trying to infuse it like I'd done with the sheets of metal. *Clang.* I swung two or three more times, placed my hammer down, and then checked the ring.

“No good...”

I could sort of tell when I felt it beneath my hammer—my magical energy still slipped right through the meghizium, even in this hardened state. I'd hoped that it would be possible to fill it with magic directly since it was no longer soft...but this seemed to be wishful thinking.

I'll just have to slowly keep working. It would be nice if I could imbue meghizium without the simple energy forge, though. That way, I could avoid making jewelstones or summoning fairies.

With a sigh, I hammered at the top steel sheet, which had gradually lost its magical energy, and imbued it once again. Then, I placed it over the simple energy forge like a lid, striking the sheet to transfer the energy into the ring. I still had lots of things to test out, but...

It's probably best to keep the meghizium inside an area dense with magical energy.

In other words, it was likely most efficient to keep hammering the sheet without removing it constantly to check on the ring. It was like a refrigerator—if you kept opening it, the food inside wouldn't stay cool. But again, this hypothesis needed to be tested.

I hit the sheet metal five times, lifted the lid, and left it like that for a short while. I then placed the sheet metal back on top and hit it five more times.

I was able to confirm that more energy had been transferred into the ring. *But it still hasn't hit its limit.* In addition, a mere five hits wasn't enough to create a jewelstone or attract fairies. *Maybe a tiny, tiny stone was made, but I can't tell.*

Next, I covered the ring with the sheet metal and hit it ten times in succession. If the ring had accumulated more energy than before, it meant that it was much more efficient to hammer away without removing the lid. After ten swings, I removed the lid and the ring. There was no jewelstone visible to the naked eye, but I stared at the ring and noted the difference.

"I knew it," I mumbled.

Though the disparity was slight, there was indeed a greater amount of magic stored inside the ring than before.

"I guess I'll keep hammering the sheet metal until it runs out of magic. It's better not to check on the ring."

I want to avoid creating a jewelstone or summoning a crowd of fairies, but those might be sacrifices I have to make in order to work with meghizium. Neither seemed particularly harmful, so I decided to turn a blind eye and focus on the task at hand.

I once again placed the lid over the ring and continued hammering. If there were any bystanders, they might've thought I was having a bad day or something. Normally, if I was working with mithril or appoitakara, I'd be able to confirm their transformation as I was hammering, which gave me a sense of accomplishment. Unfortunately, I couldn't feel anything of the sort via the simple energy forge. I could tell that magic was slowly draining from the sheet metal, but even if it was transferred inside, I couldn't take a peek. Maybe if I had a transparent acrylic board filled with magical energy instead, I might've been able to confirm, but I possessed no such thing.

I kept hitting the steel, and soon enough, it was almost completely drained of its magic. Slowly, I removed it. I expected the dense magical energy to flow out freely like a chunk of dry ice suddenly exposed to running water, but nothing of the sort happened. And if not that, I thought it might start glowing brilliantly from all the stored energy. That didn't occur either. Instead, the ring was just sitting there, looking as normal as ever. I did notice a jewelstone larger than

what I'd found this morning, proving that magical energy had been concentrated in the space.

I placed the blue stone atop the sheet I'd used as a lid and removed the ring from the simple forge. Needless to say, it hadn't grown warm or anything of the sort. Though the ring didn't glow, I knew it was filled with magic. Even a normal person with no magical abilities could probably see that.

I called out to Diana. Samya was a beastfolk with heightened senses, and I was sure that Anne had seen items filled with magical energy. Since Helen wasn't here, I felt Diana would be the closest to a "normal" person.

I handed Diana the ring, and she scrutinized it for a moment. "I see."

Next to us, Anne picked up the magical jewelstone and placed it in her hand—it hadn't crumbled yet, possibly because it was much larger than the previous one. I felt like her eyes had turned into dollar signs, but I decided to leave her be. Of course, dollars didn't exist in this world.

After looking over the ring, Diana said, "I sort of feel like it's different from usual."

"Hm. Is it warmer or something?" I asked.

"No, not really. I can't tell if this ring is glittering because of the meghizium or the magic."

"Ah, I see."

Meghizium was special (at least, I assumed so) and though it was the same color, it was different from pure gold. Because I'd been infusing the meghizium, it was hard to tell whether the ring was glimmering due to the magic or due to its special properties.

To compare, I pulled out the remaining meghizium that had not been imbued with energy.

"Awww..." I heard Anne sadly murmur. I didn't have to look—judging by her tone, I guessed that the magical jewelstone had disintegrated into the air. This implied that size was a factor in retaining its form; in other words, the greater the amount of crystallized magic, the longer it could remain solid without

crumbling.

“Here’s the meghizium that I haven’t worked on yet,” I said, ignoring Anne’s whimper. I handed Diana the soft, gold lump. “How is it?”

“Oh, it’s easier to see now. The ring is glittering a bit more.” Diana’s eyes were twinkling brighter than the ring.

“I see, I see.”

Though she wasn’t very familiar with magic, she was still able to detect this much energy.

“Guess I’ll confirm my other questions at night.”

“At night?” Diana asked.

“If this thing starts glowing, it’ll be hard for the person wearing it to sleep, don’t you think?”

“That’s true.”

As in my previous world, the people of this world rarely took off their wedding wings. I wanted the happy couple to be able to wear them while sleeping, but it’d be tough for them to go to dreamland if the rings started to shine. And, if they *did* glow, I’d need to change my methods—perhaps add enough magic to maintain hardness while preventing any luminescence. I wanted to avoid that, but if it was required, then I had no other choice.

I peered outside and saw that the sky was starting to turn orange, so I decided to start cleaning up. Suddenly, Samya’s ears twitched. I tried to ask her what was wrong, but at the same time, I thought I heard an extremely faint knock. It was so light that I wouldn’t have noticed a thing if I’d still been working.

“Did you hear that?” she asked, twitching her tiger ears once more.

“Yeah.” *So I wasn’t imagining it.*

Rike, Diana, and Anne stared back blankly, making it clear that the knock had been a very slight sound. *Loud or not, whenever the time, a customer’s a customer.* I went over and opened the door of my workshop.

“Yes, who is it?”

I stopped in my tracks.

She was in front of me, smiling—a small, floating, elfish lady...with wings.

Chapter 7: Fairy

The small woman had fluttering wings and was floating in the air. She wasn't hovering up and down in time with her wingbeats, meaning that her wings weren't pushing the air down—she was simply levitating.

The small woman gave a neat, midair bow.

"Pleased to meet you. My name is Gizelle."

"Okay." *That was a dull-witted response.* I heard either Diana or Lidy clear their throat from behind me, and I immediately straightened my posture.

"Pardon me. I wouldn't want you to just stand, uh, *float* there. Why don't you come in?"

I didn't know how much of a burden it was for Gizelle to stay in the air, but I knew it must've taken some sort of toll, so offered for her to take a seat.

"Goodness, thank you so much," Gizelle replied. She gave a smile bright enough to make flowers bloom and then glided inside.

"Over here, if you will."

"Thank you."

I didn't know if a seat was suitable for her, so I had her rest atop a table. I'd never hosted a customer so different in scale—it seemed like things made for most people would trouble her. Anne, in stark contrast to Gizelle, was larger than most, but her mother was a giantess while her father was a human. As such, she wasn't abnormally large, and at most, she needed a slightly bigger bed.

I'd considered making larger furniture, but I'd never thought about the other end of the spectrum. *But now that I think about it, if there are impossibly large people, there should be incredibly small ones too. I should be wary of that in the future when I gather items.* I had Rike prepare mint tea for our guest, but we didn't have a cup that was suitable for her stature. Unable to find a solution, we brought out the tea in the smallest container we had...but it was still around

half her size.

“I’m sure this is inconvenient, but if you don’t mind, here you are,” I said.

“Oh my! Thank you so much,” Gizelle replied. “What a lovely aroma.”

It’d gotten warmer recently, so the scent of the mint must’ve been refreshing. It seemed that our welcome was to her liking. Gizelle gently put her lips to the cup and took a small sip. I didn’t dare say it aloud, but it looked like she was drinking from a large plastic bucket.

“Whew, this is so delightful!” exclaimed Gizelle. “We don’t do stuff like this often, so I’m having a lot of fun.”

She looks like a fairy. Maybe she drinks flower nectar or something. Should I ask Lidy to grow some flowers?

“I’m glad to hear that,” I replied.

“Um, you see...” Gizelle started, sitting upright. We followed suit. “The ether—I believe you all call it magical energy—I was wondering if you refine it here?”

“I don’t think that’s our intention.” I shook my head. The jewelstone was simply a byproduct of trying to harden meghizium, and I wasn’t aiming to do anything of the sort. Besides, the gems I could create were unstable and they would easily crumble away.

“From time to time, I’ve felt heightened levels of magic from this place, but today it was even more intense,” she explained. “I just assumed.”

“Ah, no, I needed to harden that ring over there, and I just happened to make some crystallized magical energy as a byproduct. It crumbled away rather quickly too.”

“I see...”

When I showed her the ring, she slumped her small shoulders. *Are her mannerisms a bit exaggerated so that we can tell how she’s feeling?*

“Um, do you need some magical energy?” I asked.

“Well...” Gizelle trailed off and looked hesitant for a moment. Her cute appearance gave off an impression like that of an animated doll. “You’re aware

that this forest is rich with powerful magic, aren't you?"

We all nodded. *I think I told Anne about it too. Even if I didn't, I'm sure someone did.*

"We fairies live in this forest, but some of us occasionally fall ill."

"An illness?" I asked. "Like a fever or something?"

"Yes. It's a bit different from how you all get sick, but magical energy escapes from our bodies."

"That means..."

"That's right. It's an illness that leads to death."

I heard someone gulp. The room fell silent.

"The cure for this is to be exposed to powerful magical energy, but there isn't a place so convenient within this forest."

"Not even here?" I asked, pointing to the ground.

"It's not enough," she replied with a shake of her head. "Pardon me." She took two sips of her tea.

The reason beasts didn't lurk around this area was because of the powerful magical energy. Even the trees of this forest avoided the land around us.

"This place does indeed have strong energy," she continued, "but for a cure, we need more."

"Which is why you need crystallized magic on the regular."

"That's right!" She stood up excitedly.

I get why she wants to rely on anything she can. She just found a ray of hope that might cure an incurable disease.

"But if it crumbles away so quickly, I suppose it's no good," she lamented.

"I was planning on experimenting in my free time to see if I could keep it crystallized for longer periods...but I don't know when I'd be able to do that, even if I was rushed."

"Right..."

I didn't want to cast a shadow on her ray of hope, but I also didn't want to lie to her. Gizelle sat back down, looking defeated.

Hm. I'd love to help her out if I could... Ah, I know.

"You just need strong magical energy, right?" I asked her.

"That's right."

"Then, if you find anyone who falls ill, could you bring them there? I can make crystallized energy right then and there. If it heals that person, we can keep doing so until we find a method of keeping the magic solidified."

I wasn't anything grand as a doctor, but I was more than happy to do this if I could save the lives of the fairies.

"Are you sure?!" Gizelle cried, standing back up. Her face broke out into a smile, still blooming like a flower.

"Sure."

"Thank you so much!"

She bowed deeply. *It seems like every species has adopted similar mannerisms, but is this due to the effects of the war from ages ago?* I stuck out my finger to offer her a handshake, and she gripped it tightly.

Once that matter had been settled, I decided to ask a few questions.

"You don't just suddenly appear, do you?"

The others, including Lidy, nodded along. The general consensus was apparently that fairies suddenly popped into existence, played a prank, and then disappeared without a trace. Mischievous like a small child, it was hard to harbor a grudge against them. *Though in my previous world, some fairies that showed up in myths and tales were pretty awful and ruthless.*

Hearing my words, Gizelle puffed her cheeks. "Those are spirits! We fairies would never do something so vulgar!"

She looked so adorable that I was about to smile before I could apologize. *It sounds like she could just appear and disappear, but she won't do it.* I was also able to learn another thing from her words—a species called spirits existed.

Today's pretty exciting.

"I'm sorry," I apologized. "That's just the impression that we had."

"Well, it's a very big misunderstanding!"

"We'll correct our views."

Since fairies seemed to rarely appear in front of others, they might've gotten mixed up with spirits. I wasn't keen on telling others that I'd met a fairy, and if these misunderstandings were to be rectified, fairies would need to appear more frequently. *I guess we just need to do it one step at a time.*

I put that aside for now, unsure of whether I ever wanted to touch that topic again.

"So will you tell the other fairies?" I asked. "We'll look after those who have fallen ill and help them replenish their magical energy."

"Yes. I'm the chief of the fairies in this forest, so I believe they'll listen to me."

I felt myself raise an eyebrow. *Maybe Gizelle came in through the front door and is extremely polite because she had a very good upbringing. I wonder if all fairies are as well-mannered as she is.* It wouldn't do me any good to point that out, so I decided to keep mum. Though I had a lot of other questions, I decided to save them for another day; for now, I didn't need to know anything new.

"Well, I'll be taking my leave," Gizelle said, standing up and giving a graceful bow.

"Ah, I do have one warning," I replied, stopping her. "We're all usually here from dawn to dusk, but once every week or two, we head to the city. On those days, we'll leave this place empty until the sun is high in the sky. And while I like to keep it to a minimum, there are times when I travel for a month, at most. I hope for your understanding."

She smiled back. "Of course. Though I mentioned that this illness would lead to death, it's not instantaneous. The affected fairy will slowly lose their strength, and they'll suffer until they die." She sighed, perhaps hinting that she'd seen some of her friends leave this world. "So even if you're not here, we can visit on another day. You don't have to worry about that."

“I’m grateful to hear that. When I’m here, I’ll try to prepare the crystallized magical energy as fast as I can.”

“Thank you.” She once again bowed. “Ah, of course. Humans require a reward in return, do they not?”

“Huh? Uh, I guess.”

Since it was a byproduct of my work, I didn’t think of receiving anything in return. I was about to decline her offer, but I felt some sharp gazes stabbing me from behind.

“Then how about I give the fairy’s blessing on this ring as payment in advance?”

“I actually have one more ring to make, but the material hasn’t been worked on yet.”

“Oh? Then could you please bring that as well? The blessing won’t fade no matter what you do to it, so please be at ease.”

That kinda sounds like a curse...but I guess they’re two sides of the same coin. I followed Gizelle’s request, placing the ring and the rest of the meghizium on the table. She proceeded to fly circles over the items.

Gizelle spoke in a singsong voice. “I shall now apply the blessing of the fairies of the Black Forest. May the wearer be blessed with great happiness.”



For a brief moment, a pale blue light glowed from the ring and the meghizium.

“Whoa...” Everyone in the workshop, myself included, couldn’t suppress the wonder in our voices.

Gizelle proudly puffed out her chest before taking her leave. “I suppose I’ve bothered you all for a bit too long. Please excuse me.” She floated in front of the open door and bowed once more.

“If you’ve got any more troubles, feel free to drop by at any time,” I said.

“Thank you so much.”

It’d gotten dark outside, but Gizelle floated through the night and disappeared.

“She’s gone.”

“She really is.”

As I was about to shut the door, I saw our two daughters approach me. Krul and Lucy had been patiently sitting still and were now wagging their tails. *Come to think of it, they didn’t make a fuss when Gizelle dropped by.*

“You two are so smart. You’re both such good girls,” I cooed, stroking their heads.

As a reward, I guess we can all eat dinner out on the terrace.

Chapter 8: I'm Home

It was the day after we'd received a visit from Gizelle, the chief of the fairies in the Black Forest. Currently, I was standing in front of Marius's finished ring.

I let out a groan.

Gizelle's blessing wasn't an issue. It was great that the rings had increased in value—items made of meghizium were already scarce and wildly expensive, and another rare effect had simply been added, increasing the ring's worth. As long as Marius didn't publicly speak about it, I doubted anyone would notice. Not many people in this world would've seen an item blessed by a fairy.

"But what kind of blessing did she give?" I mumbled.

Judging by yesterday's series of events, I was pretty sure that her magic had been positive—a blessing instead of a curse. Since Samya hadn't butted in during the conversation, Gizelle probably hadn't been lying. But fairies weren't human, and they were very small; it might've been difficult for even Samya to catch the scent of deception.

I thought back to the incantation Gizelle had used: "*May the wearer be blessed with great happiness.*" In RPG terms, it might've given a status effect that raised a character's LUK stat.

"Hmmm..."

I gazed at the ring, looking at its composition beneath natural light. A faint blue glow shone across the glittering gold of the meghizium. It seemed obvious to me since I knew what to look for, but the blue was truly faint—had I not known about it, I might not have noticed.

While I was grumbling over my thoughts, Rike, who'd finished her preparations, stood next to me and peered at the ring.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"About the blessing from yesterday..." I proceeded to explain my concerns.

“I see.”

“I’m sure she didn’t do anything weird...but I just don’t know how to prove that.”

“Hmmm...” We both folded our arms in front of us and thought hard.

“Eizo, why don’t you try on the ring, just once?” Diana suggested.

“Can I?” If it were a knife, I would’ve tested it out instantly, but I was a bit hesitant to wear a wedding ring.

“I don’t think you can wear Julie’s, but I’m sure my brother’s will fit.”

“Right.”

This ring was larger because it’d been designed for Marius. And since I had to test out some new methods...well, if something went wrong, I would feel just a little less guilty ruining my friend’s ring than his wife’s.

“Why don’t you just do one trial run?” asked Diana. “If anything happens, you can just say that I, his family member, gave my approval.”

“I’m grateful for that proposal, but I’m not planning on using you as a shield like that.” Whatever happened would be my own responsibility—nothing less would be fair to my dear friend. Diana had simply given me words of advice and nothing more.

“But I guess I won’t be able to do anything if I just stand idly around,” I mumbled.

“Exactly.”

I nodded at Diana. “All right. I guess I’ll wear the ring.”

I couldn’t bring myself to wear it on my ring finger, so I decided to fit it onto the pinky of my right hand. It was a bit too large, but that was the best alternative.

“How is it?” Diana asked.

“No headache or any other adverse effects for now.”

I manipulated the ring, sliding up and down. It moved normally and didn’t get stuck on my finger or anything. I’d prepared for the worst by putting it on my

pinky—if the “blessing” had made the ring impossible to remove, I could’ve cut my pinky off. Luckily, it seemed that I’d been worried for nothing.

For a while, I stayed still, watching out for anything negative, but nothing happened. Then, I gingerly transferred the ring onto my index finger, but again, nothing happened. I flexed a little, did some light stretches, swung a hammer in the air, and engaged in other activities, but...nothing. My body didn’t feel heavier; my hammer didn’t magically slip out of my hands.

“I don’t know what conditions need to be fulfilled for the blessing to activate, but it doesn’t appear to pose a threat,” I concluded.

“Then that’s good enough,” said Diana.

“Right.” I nodded. It wasn’t necessarily bad for a pain-in-the-ass craftsman to be doubtful of others, but it seemed fine to trust people—or fairies, in this case—to an extent. However, if they betrayed me, I wouldn’t hold back.

“Seems fine. Now I just need to make Julie’s ring.”

“Good luck!”

“Thanks.”

I tossed the rest of the meghizium into the simple energy forge, getting ready to process it, but then, I heard the clapper sounding. It came from the door to our house, not the one to the forge. We never had customers opening that door during this time of day. *It’s either bandits, or...*

“I’m home!”

Almost immediately after hearing the clappers, the door between the workshop and the cabin slammed open, and a redheaded woman entered. Atop her clothes, she wore a golden breastplate.

“Welcome back, Helen,” I said. “That was quick.”

“I got to meet everyone sooner than expected,” she replied.

Helen had gone to visit her friends in the capital, and now she was home. I peered at her knapsack and noticed it was full to the brim, but I had no idea what was inside.

“Why don’t you unpack and rest for a bit?” I suggested. “I’ll call you when lunch is ready.”

“Gotcha. Thanks!”

Before Helen returned to her room, she greeted everyone else in the workshop. I didn’t think this would occur often, but I just got this feeling—when everyone acted so overjoyed about her coming home safely, it felt like we’d truly become a family. *I guess I’ll make our lunch a bit more luxurious than usual...but I should finish up some work on this ring first.*

I sat in front of the simple energy forge and transferred my magic into the meghizium. My goal today was to make it firm enough to work with, so I had to occasionally open the lid to check its composition. Right before I was about to break for lunch, I felt the metal and decided that it had become the perfect hardness—I shaped it into a smaller ring. Once that was finished, I smoothed out the ring’s surface and prepared to work on it more after lunch. *I sure do wish the thing had been this firm from the start.*

I set aside the gold ring, which shimmered slightly with a blue tint, and prepared our afternoon meal.

Lunch was generally soup and unleavened bread with occasional bits of fried meat, but today I prepared meat seasoned with a soy sauce base, making it a bit more extravagant than usual.

Alcohol would be served at night. We all still had some work to do today—I’d planned on abstaining while encouraging others to drink, but they all decided to wait for tonight as well. *I’m just not great at holding my booze.* We toasted anyway, raising our cups of water.

“Welcome home, Helen!”

“I-I’m home!”

And so, we started our lunch. It felt a bit different, but this was actually just a return to our normal liveliness.

“How was the capital?” I asked.

“The usual. It was peaceful.” She took a sip of her soup. “Oh, but there’s one

thing.”

“And what’s that?”

She placed her spoon down and faced Diana. “Heard your older bro’s getting married. Congratulations.”

“Thank you,” Diana said, placing her fork down and bowing.

“Is Marius’s marriage so talked about that even mercenaries know of it?” I asked.

“It’s the wedding of a count who has recently been very successful,” Helen replied. “What’s more, it’s a marriage culminating from the love between childhood friends. People in the capital won’t leave it alone.”

“I can see why.”

If I were to use my previous world as a reference, it’d be like a famous actor getting married. Of course it was huge news—that was only natural. I just wasn’t interested in that sort of stuff. *Huh, actually, I remember seeing news like that before I came to this world. I think it was covered by some show playing on the TV in a café near my old company.*

“It’s a little embarrassing,” Diana admitted.

I cocked my head. “Why? Because people are gossiping in the capital?”

“Yeah. I just hope nothing troublesome occurs.” She scrunched her nose, but I was puzzled by what she meant.

“Ah...” Anne said, seemingly catching on. Everyone turned toward her, and she shrugged. “Well, it’s obvious to me that once her older brother weds, people will start asking her about her own marriage plans.”

Right. I sometimes forget, but Diana’s an aristocratic daughter of a count. In actuality...

“In actuality, I should’ve been long married,” Diana said. “But that’s all just bothersome to me. I think the lifestyle here suits me well.”

“But...” I started.

I stopped, snapping my mouth shut. Diana stared right at me, and Anne faced

me while shaking her head.

Seems best to keep quiet right now...

“By the way, I heard a fairy visited,” Helen said cheerily, shooing away the heavy atmosphere.

“Chief of the fairies,” I replied. “Her name’s Gizelle.”

“Huh. Wish I coulda seen that.”

“I don’t know if you’ll ever see her specifically, but I promised to look after any sick fairies, so I’m sure you’re bound to encounter a fairy or two.”

“Really?!”

“Yep.”

I nodded and Helen beamed brightly. *Right, almost forgot—she loves cute stuff.* Helen had apparently been trying her best to hide that fact, but when I saw her occasionally petting Lucy, she wore a smile broader than Diana’s.

“I didn’t know you were a fairy doctor, Eizo,” she said.

“Well, I can only heal fairies who have fallen sick due to their bodies losing magical energy. I can’t treat them for anything else.”

I was like a specialist doctor who could only look after one condition. *Maybe I’m more of a physical therapist since I can’t even diagnose them. I’m not even a pharmacist since I can only give out one type of medicine.*

“Speaking of—Lidy, what do elves do when they fall ill?” I quickly added, “If you don’t want to answer, you don’t have to.”

Elves also lived by absorbing magical energy. Since fairies seemed to die if their bodies were completely drained of this energy, I guessed that the two species weren’t so different in that sense.

“It’s not difficult to talk about or anything,” Lidy started. “We don’t fall ill often. Elven medicine generally doesn’t differ much from the kind practiced in the city or capital. We mostly put medicinal herbs in our tea since a majority of elves can grow them.”

“Everyone in your species has that knowledge?”

“Just about. I think the doctors in the city are a bit more knowledgeable. If someone becomes seriously ill, we’ll usually take them to the doctor instead.”

Does absorbing magic make you more resistant to disease? If I met Nilda again, I decided I’d ask her about how demons reacted to it. However, fairies in particular seemed to require more powerful magical energy to survive. This meant that they didn’t succumb to normal illnesses, but in exchange, they’d sometimes become stricken by an incurable sickness. If there was even a sliver of hope that it could be cured, they would rely on anyone they could. I felt a small shiver run up my spine when I realized the responsibility I’d just shouldered. *But I think I can do my best for someone who needs my help.*

I continued to spoon soup into my mouth as though I was hiding my resolve.

After our short yet rowdy lunch, I started my afternoon work. I told Helen that she could take the rest of the day off, but she said she’d gotten plenty of rest this morning and hadn’t exerted herself on the way home. In fact, she was already jumping in to help Samya and Diana. *She hasn’t been working here for long, so maybe it’s like some sort of restful rehabilitation for her.*

I took up the ring again and proceeded to carve the same pattern into the metal. Because it was a bit smaller, I had to be more precise in my detail work—I was so grateful that my age hadn’t set in just yet because I could still see items up close. If I had presbyopia, or age-related farsightedness, I doubted I’d have been able to chisel such small designs.

Still, I had to strain my eyes quite a bit, so they quickly grew tired. Occasionally, I’d press down on my eyes and feel them grow slightly damp. I’d experienced this sensation numerous times in my previous world, but I didn’t know if I could find the sensation nostalgic.

Once I finished carving, I smoothed out any edges. And since I was just following the process I’d invented for the previous ring, progress proceeded smoothly. A short while later, an almost completely finished ring was sitting on the workbench. Faint blue light shone alongside the shimmering gold. If one were to squeeze these rings without knowing the material was meghizium, they would’ve never believed that the substance had originally been very soft.

I gently placed the ring inside the simple energy forge, then slid the lid, filled with my magic, atop it. I hammered, once again transferring my power into the center. There were no ultrasonic tools I could use, so as always, I couldn't tell what was going on inside the simple energy forge. I could only use my instincts.

Increasing the density of magical energy seemed useful for a variety of cases besides meghizium—it'd be especially efficient in fulfilling my role as a fairy doctor. Though, it was essential that I find a way to keep the magical energy crystallized.

At the moment, my hammer continuously pounded the metal box before me. Every *clang* that rang in the air meshed with the sounds of Rike and Samya working. While I maintained the same rhythm, Rike and Samya changed their beats at times. *I feel like, if I recorded this, it would make a pretty silly song.*

I continued hammering away until dusk, taking a few breaks in between and going outside to pay some attention to Krul and Lucy. It was a good change of pace. For the entirety of the process, I didn't open the simple energy forge.

However, as the sun started to set, I did gingerly lift the lid. It was now completely drained of its magical energy. Before I knew it, the others had gathered around. The ring looked practically unchanged in appearance, though a familiar blue jewelstone was sitting inside.

"Whoa," Helen said, staring at the crystallized magical energy for the first time. I took out the moderately large stone and handed it to her. "It's pretty."

"It is, isn't it? It won't retain that form for long though."

While I was talking, the magical jewelstone was already gradually fading away. Anne and Lidy peered in from the sides in amusement.

"Oh no..." Helen looked sad as the jewelstone silently disintegrated.

As a person raised in Japanese culture, I personally found beauty in its fleeting existence and evanescence, but I wasn't sure if everyone else felt the same.

"Anyway, the real deal is the ring."

I removed the accessory from the forge and placed it under the glow of the waning sunset. Beneath the orange dusk, the ring's shine was even more

golden, and the faint blue light seemed stronger than it had been this morning. If Gizelle had spoken the truth, then the fairy's blessing was within this ring. I gently tapped the ring with my hammer—it gave a clear *clang* in response. I steadily increased my strength, eventually striking hard enough to flatten pure gold. But the ring merely gave off a sharp sound and remained unscathed.

“I guess both of these are done now,” I murmured.

A small cheer filled the workshop.

Chapter 9: Hihirokane

We decided to throw a grand party tonight to celebrate two significant things: finishing Marius's wedding rings and properly welcoming Helen home. The meat was fried and separated into three differently spiced dishes—one had salt and pepper, another was dressed in some soy sauce, and the third was accompanied by a wine and berry sauce. Alcohol would be served too, of course. We also had our usual soup and bread, which was a little unfortunate, but the overall meal was good enough for a party hastily thrown together in the middle of the forest.

We carried some tables and chairs out onto the terrace, then lined up the dishes and alcohol on the table. *We've been eating outside a lot. Maybe we can eat dinner out here on sunny days and build a new table just for that purpose.*

Once seated, I raised my glass. "A toast to finishing the wedding rings and welcoming Helen back!"

"Cheers!"

Krul and Lucy joined in on the toast. Lucy was sitting on Helen's lap and being fed bits of fried, unseasoned meat. Both Lucy and Helen seemed to be enjoying themselves. Krul had stuck her head out and received head pats from Diana before settling down nearby to relax. She didn't seem to eat or drink much, but she liked the festive cheer. Everyone gathered around Helen and asked for stories from the capital—they'd missed their chance to do so during lunch. Mostly, they inquired about her mercenary friends.

"So a few people quit?" Diana asked.

"Yeah," Helen replied. "They all found different jobs or got married."

"It's a pity, but I'm glad."

"Yep."

Helen had gone to tell others that she was safe, and she was certainly happy to hear that the others were doing well too. Her expression softened when she

talked about her friends.

“Ah, right!” Helen exclaimed, abruptly standing up. “I almost forgot.”

Lucy was already on Diana’s lap (she was apparently able to read the room and anticipate Helen’s potential boisterousness). Helen darted inside and came back out with her knapsack, the one that’d been filled to the brim when she’d first gotten home.

“I don’t just have stories to bring back as souvenirs—I’ve got actual items too. Most of these were pushed onto me when I told them about you guys,” Helen admitted.

A good chunk of the dishes had been polished off, and the table had been cleared, so Helen had room to display the items. She pulled out various objects, from daily necessities to random knickknacks. A few caught my eye.

“Is this a comb?” I asked. “And...what’s this?” Helen had removed what appeared to be the main bulge from her pack. It looked like a large urn, tightly sealed with leather and wax.

“I was told that it’s scented oil,” Helen answered. “Someone who’s especially picky about their appearance gave it to me, saying, ‘Wherever you may go, make sure to keep yourself beautiful. It’ll do you good.’”

“I see.”

Though she was mercenary, Helen was a woman—whether there were men around or not, it seemed natural for them to want to maintain a degree of cleanliness and prettiness even when on the battlefield. Sadly, as an internally forty-year-old man, I didn’t really think like that. Diana had brought her own comb to the cabin, but Rike had said that her hair was too stiff and would break a comb, so she didn’t own any.

“Maybe I’ll ask Camilo about that next time,” I mumbled.

“We have no one to be put-together for,” Anne replied demurely. *You’re a princess... No need to act so reserved.*

“Well, it’s more about how you feel,” I explained. “It’s nice if it puts you in a good mood, right? You don’t have to dress yourself up every day, just whenever

you feel like you want to look prettier.”

“Hmmm...” Anne sounded uninterested, but her tone gave it away—she was indeed looking forward to a little pampering. *She might even grow to like cosmetics if she continued to use them.*

“They gave you a huge amount,” I pointed out. “Seems expensive.”

Helen shrugged. “I was told they got it for cheap through a secret source.”

“Huh.”

I was a bit curious to know the details, but also somewhat scared to learn the truth. *I think it's best if I let sleeping dogs lie on this one...*

Helen had received two collars from a friend who loved living creatures, so we put them on Krul and Lucy, who seemed elated about their new accessories. Finally, Rike took out a small box.

“Oh, it's quite heavy. What's inside?” she asked.

“Something that Eizo wants.” Helen grinned.

“Me?” I asked as I suddenly heard my name.

She nodded. “I was only able to get a small pebble, though.”

Rike opened the lid. Inside was a glob of ore that emitted a red glimmer.

“Apparently, it's hihirokane,” Helen explained.

My eyes widened in astonishment and awe. “Is this really...?”

The piece was small, but it seemed to reflect the light of magical energy, and a red glow flitted across its surface. I pinched the ore, about two centimeters in length, and removed it from the box. Even this small bit felt heavy.

Legends from my previous world swirled with rumors about hihirokane. They claimed that it was lighter than gold, though in my hands, it felt much heavier. I pressed the small lump between my fingertips, but in contrast to the soft meghizium, it didn't give way at all. I'd been a bit worried, but it seemed that hihirokane didn't behave the same way.

“How'd you get this?” I asked in awe. “Must've been expensive.”

Helen was all smiles as she watched me carefully inspecting the metal. Hihirokane was much rarer than appoitakara. Even a piece of this size must've cost one or two gold coins, perhaps more.

"Well, someone owed me a favor," she replied with a smirk.

A favor where you can just take hihirokane must've been a pretty big one... Is she really okay with giving this to me as a souvenir? I suddenly realized that she may have been returning or giving favors during her stay at the capital, and though I was a bit curious, I didn't want to pry further, especially if she wasn't willing to divulge.

And so, I simply said, "Thank you."

"S-Sure," she replied, looking a little embarrassed.

It would be difficult to forge an item from a clump of this size. I thought for a moment about making an alloy, but I ultimately decided to use this metal as a testing tool. Meghizium required a special process, so if hihirokane required something unique too, I wanted to find that out sooner rather than later.

"Does this thing have magical energy within it?" I wondered out loud.

"Shall I take a look?" Lidy began staring intently at the hihirokane. "Hm. It's hard to tell. Something is flickering inside, similar to the red jewelstone, but there doesn't appear to be much."

"So if I were to process this, I'd need to find a way to add magic."

Rike's eyes glimmered. "Like with the meghizium!"

"Right."

She gave a satisfied nod. Though she still had much to learn, if she continued to train at my workshop, I thought she might become an artisan dwarf who could work with any sort of metal. *Is it all right for me to train a dwarven blacksmith who could possibly alter the course of this world? Well, I don't want to chase her out and tell her that she has nothing more to learn from me.* I decided to reevaluate my stance on that once I'm able to obtain metals like adamantite and orichalcum.

Since it was such a rare sight, the hihirokane had been passed around the

table. *Rare to everyone except for Anne. She can probably gaze upon this stuff whenever she wishes.* Everyone seemed extremely interested. It wasn't so precious that one could call it a jewel, but it was valuable enough that everyone took every precaution when looking at it. *It's like seeing the bismuth crystals of my previous world.*

We soon moved on to discussions of what to do with it. I guessed that some would want to work on it right away while others would want to store it, but in the end, we all unanimously voted to keep it on the *kamidana* for a while. Everyone agreed that it just seemed natural to do so.

Have they all been so influenced by our morning routine? I was happy but a bit flustered by that revelation, thinking that my culture may have invaded their values a little. I stepped inside for a moment, placing the hihiirokane on the shelf—it would only be removed when I wanted to work with it. *It glows red, so it does seem to be a bit of a good luck charm.* The hihiirokane was now enshrined next to the statue of the goddess on the *kamidana*. *Those two won't fight or anything, right?*

I went back out to the terrace, and we proceeded to talk about the state of affairs in the capital since we didn't get a chance to do so during lunch. There weren't any major wars or subjugating missions for now, which allowed Marius's wedding to be the predominant talk amongst the people. Perhaps the margrave had timed the wedding deliberately so the news would spread. *Though it's not like I can check... I hope I can't.* Above all, I wanted to remain a simple blacksmith.

In other news (or lack thereof), there were no shady affairs going on. The kingdom's plan (in coordination with the empire) to take out those treasonous nobles was progressing silently—though the targets were both aristocrats, they weren't of high rank, so their deaths would never become a huge story.

"It's so peaceful," I murmured casually.

"I told you so during lunch, didn't I?" Helen replied with a frown. "But thanks to that, I had plenty of time on my hands, so I was able to return here sooner than expected."

The work of mercenaries would inevitably decrease during times of peace.

Some could switch jobs, but those who couldn't would be in a spot of trouble. Helen wasn't sure if she should be happy or saddened by this news. *Though they're not as efficient as merchants, mercenaries can sneak into various places and sniff out any suspicious rumors. If even they can't find anything, it's either really peaceful, or...*

"I'm just praying that nothing's happening behind the scenes where even we can't tell," Helen finished.

We all nodded, and Diana's was especially firm.

The next morning after we finished our daily routine, we prayed to the *kamidana*, which now had another divine item upon it. The wooden statue reflected the bright red glow of the *hihirokane*, and it looked like she was bathing us in ruby light.

Samya stood at the front of the group—she planned to take everyone except Rike and me out on a hunt. Since Helen had just returned yesterday, I asked if she was okay, but she replied with a grin and a flex of her biceps. I slumped my shoulders and shook my head as I sent her and the rest of the household away.

Once I lit the firebed and saw it start to warm, I walked over to Rike to discuss our plans for the day. She'd intended on forging more of our mass-produced items.

"Well, I finished the rings, but that's just the work we were hired to do. I was thinking of making a little present for them."

"A present?" Rike asked.

I nodded. In fact, I'd already decided on my gift.

"Since you'll be making it, Boss, will it be from the Nordic region?"

"Yeah. Nothing too grand though."

"I really can't take those words at face value..." She looked at me dubiously. *It is true that all my custom models have amazing abilities.*

I forced a smile. "No need to worry—I'll be making a normal shortsword this time around."

“A sword?”

“Remember the one I made for Nilda?”

“Sure do.”

“It’ll be like that, but smaller—the size of a knife.”

“That really does represent us,” she gushed. “Sounds lovely.”

“Right?”

I planned on making a dagger without a decorative hilt as a gift to Marius’s wife, one she could use for self-defense. Back on Earth, some people claimed that blades were bad luck because they could cut through bonds, but defensive weapons could also slice through unfortunate relationships. I’d heard that many women received a blade when they went off to marry, so I’d settled on this as a gift. I thought it best to not inform others of the other saying attached to this blade: “Slash one’s own throat should anything disastrous occur.” In any case, it seemed like a perfect gift from a blacksmith from the Nordic region.

This time around, instead of sandwiching steel sheets with different hardnesses, I decided to forge the blade out of a single sheet of steel. If I imbued it, the metal would become about as hard as it would during the multiple-sheet method.

I placed steel into the firebed and waited for it to grow hot. Since I’d been working on the rings, it’d been a while since I’d had to wait on something to heat up. Once the sheet was hot enough, I placed it on my anvil and hammered down, creating an indent. I was only making one knife out of this sheet, so I didn’t think *tsumiwakashi* would be needed.

Soon, I reached the *sunobe* (elongating) step. I lengthened the steel to around twenty centimeters, with a *nakago*, or tang, jutting out. Then, I sliced off the ends, molded a *kissaki*, hammered the sheet to create a pentagonal cross section, and used a whetstone and a file to smooth out the surface.

“Hmmm.”

Once I was done, I raised it in the air—before my eyes was a blade in the approximate shape of a knife. I still had a bit more work to do, but I’d created

the rough outline for now. I already knew how it would turn out.

“It’s beautiful,” Rike said.

“I don’t plan on adding a *sori*—a curve—to it, but it looks pretty good.”

“It does.” She nodded.

Will Nordic knives start to rise in popularity amongst the people here? I didn’t think they’d wield an *ōdachi* blade with leather armor—not exactly—but I hoped that even after this blade left the forge, people would remain considerate of other cultures.

“This seems like a good stopping point,” I declared. “Shall we have lunch?”

“Yeah,” Rike replied.

“By the way, how much magical energy can you see now?”

“Well, you see...”

Under the watchful gazes of the goddess statue and the hihirokane, I closed the door to the workshop.

After lunch, I went straight back to work. Rike was mass-producing knives, and I was completing the blade for Marius’s wife. Before I added the finishing touches, I decided to ask a question.

“I can’t make another one and add the hihirokane to the blade, can I?”

“Wouldn’t that become a prized family heirloom?” Rike countered.

“I guess so.”

I was already giving the happy couple a pair of priceless rings made from meghizium, blessed by a fairy for good measure. As such, I figured that adding on a blade made from hihirokane would be overkill. The Eimoor’s treasured family heirloom sword might be overshadowed by a knife like that. *I doubt they’d change their family heirloom though, since the current sword was originally granted by the king himself.* Even if they did switch the family heirloom in their hearts, they’d have to act like the sword from the king was their most prized treasure.

Above all, I'd have to figure out how to work with the hihirokane. I planned on spending plenty of time with it later.

"Guess I'll finish this up for now."

"That sounds good. I'll be doing this one."

I held up my blade as Rike held up her sheet of steel, and we each got back to work.

I'd already smoothed out the surface of my knife. I placed some *yakiba-tsuchi* nearby—this paste used in the quenching step would guide the pattern of the *hamon*, just like it would when forging a *katana*. After I made my preparations, I went to fetch some hot water from the kitchen.

I normally used water to quench my blades, though not necessarily *hot* water. During quenching, the rate of cooling would differ based on where the *yakiba-tsuchi* was placed, creating a *sori*—the distinctive curvature of a Japanese-style blade. In other words, if the rate of cooling was even, not much of a *sori* would form (which was my intention since I didn't want to add much curve). Also, I'd normally use mineral oil or the like to make sure that the entirety of the blade cooled slowly, but we didn't have anything like that here.

Because of this, the aim of using hot water was to emulate an effect similar to oil quenching. The water wouldn't be at a boil, but it'd be enough to burn someone if they stuck their hand in. Though, when brought into the forge, the water would actually need to be a bit hotter than that—during the time it would take to heat the blade, the water would cool slightly, and I'd need to account for it losing heat. Of course, my cheats made those calculations a lot easier.

I slowly heated the knife, coated in the *yakiba-tsuchi*, over the fire. Right before the weapon was at a perfect temperature to start quenching, I glanced at the hot water—the temperature was just right. I immediately removed the knife from the firebed and vertically dipped it into the container of hot water. A sizzling sound filled the air, and through the tongs, I could feel the blade start to cool. With my cheats, I was able to know the condition of the blade and the exact timing for removing it from the water.

When I pulled the knife out, I saw that there was only a very slight *sori*.

Success!

The blade tempered in the firebed for a time, and then I set it on my anvil. I hammered away to smooth over any distortions and adjust the *sori*. After a few rhythmic *clangs*, the knife (shortsword?) had become straight.

I moved on from my rougher whetstone to a more delicate one, then polished the blade and sharpened the edge. In my former world, some artisans and craftsmen specialized only in the sharpening step, but I was blessed with my cheats and could do both the smithing and sharpening.

Finally, after using an iron rod to ensure that the *hamon* would show up more clearly, the blade was complete. As usual, it had an *ibuki kissaki* tip with a *notare hamon*.

I hadn't noticed while forging, but it resembled a smaller version of the sword I'd made for Nilda. I'd often heard the saying "each craftsman has a unique style," and I'd found that to be true.

Holding the blade up to the sunset, I saw that it reflected the orange glow. Suddenly, I heard the clapper to the forge—everyone must've returned from hunting.

"We'll finish the rest tomorrow," I said to Rike as I stretched out my back and started to clean up.

The door connecting the house and workshop opened, and Diana rushed in. This was a bit unusual—Samya was usually the first to emerge.

"Welcome back. What's wrong?" I asked.

"We're home!" she announced. "Could I use some water? The kind we don't drink."

"Hm? Of course. We've also finished for the day."

"All right. Thank you."

"Did something happen?"

Every day after work, we would all wash ourselves, no matter what. The workshop was a sweaty environment, and it was easy to get covered in dirt and dust while out hunting. Since Diana knew about this habit, it was clear she

needed water for a different reason.

“We got a large wild boar today, but while we were dumping it in the lake, Lucy dove in,” Diana explained.

“Ah. I suppose it’s been pretty warm recently.”

Since several mountain springs flowed into the lake, it was filled with cold water—definitely refreshing on a hot day. Honestly, I could understand Lucy’s feelings all too well since I was often tempted to take a dip myself.

Diana nodded. “It would be fine if she’d just jumped in, but she followed up by rolling around on the ground. She’s covered in mud. We considered dunking her in the lake again, but it would be meaningless if she just rolled around again. We didn’t have a large towel either, so we just brought her home.”

“I see. I think we’ve got enough water to wash Lucy off—feel free to use it all.”

“Okay, got it.”

With a nod, she rushed outside. When she opened the door, I could hear Lucy barking.

The whole affair had sounded rather hectic, so I asked about it while we ate dinner out on the terrace. Apparently, it’d been a larger mess than I’d anticipated.

“It...was sudden,” Samya said with a forced smile.

“I’m sure Lucy only meant to tag along with everyone,” Anne added, also smiling. She seemed to have grown fond of Lucy. *Our pup listens to others very well, and she’s such a good girl. Krul is too.*

“I guess even the Lightning Strike can’t keep up with that,” I remarked with a laugh.

“Yeah, no, impossible,” Helen replied, shaking her head. “I don’t think there’s a single human being alive who could keep up with a hunting dog raised in the Black Forest.”

Lucy’s athletic abilities had grown remarkably; I wasn’t sure if this was

because she'd become a magical beast. Even without that, she *was* an animal living in this forest—people could only keep up with her for so long. I'd heard that, though she was still a baby wolf, Lucy assisted magnificently in searching for and chasing down game.

Lucy, seemingly tired from her work today or exhausted from being washed, voraciously ate her meat before curling up by my feet, where she fell asleep peacefully.

"Krul has gotten faster at running too," Lidy said, watching the drake, also curled in a ball, outside the terrace.

Diana nodded. "The boar we got was huge, but she easily carried it. She even played tag with Lucy on our way home."

"I guess Krul's growing up too," I said.

"Probably. I've never owned a drake, so I'm not really sure."

"Once they get bigger, we should build new houses for them."

"Yeah."

Diana and I looked at Krul. I wasn't sure if Krul's abilities were increasing due to the magical energy from the forest, or if she was just physically becoming stronger. However, if she was indeed growing larger, I needed to create an environment that would be more suited for her. They were our precious daughters, after all. I was basically willing to do anything within my power to make them comfortable.

As we were cleaning the dinner table, Krul woke up, bit Lucy by the scruff of her neck, and lifted her away. Lucy, either used to being transported like that or too tired to care, let herself be carried. Krul walked slowly and carefully so as to not wake her.

Thus, as I watched the drake carry the baby wolf back to their houses, our day came to an end.

Chapter 10: Summer's Here

The next morning when I left the house to go fetch some water, I was greeted by an energetic Krul and Lucy. No matter how tired they were, a night of sleep was all it took to get them back to full strength. I wondered if this was due to their youth—I was envious of their regenerative capabilities. *The older I get, the slower I am to recover.* I could practically feel my physical limits decreasing by the day.

As usual, Krul and I carried two jugs of water, and I gave Lucy a small jug, tied with a short string, for her to carry. She took the string in her mouth happily. If she let out a bark, she'd drop the jug, so she conveyed her joy by furiously wagging her tail.

"All right. Let's go."

I patted Krul and Lucy's heads as we headed out to get some water. We'd have to return to the lake later today to collect the submerged spoils of yesterday's hunt. Since the boar was large, I didn't want to add any extra burden on Krul by having her drag it home now. Besides, the two girls seemed to look forward to this morning routine. So, even though it was a bit of extra work, I decided to take two trips—one for the water and one for the boar.

We arrived at the lake, filled up our jugs, and washed our bodies. Since Lucy had gotten all muddy yesterday, she'd been washed thoroughly, but she still willingly jumped into the lake this morning. *Maybe she equates the lake to a place where one gets clean, but she never rolls around on the ground after we fetch water. I guess yesterday's heat got to her, and seeing everyone else in the lake made her want to dive in.*

Once we finished cleaning ourselves, we decided to head back. We'd have to return again soon. Lucy, seemingly wanting to show off that she knew the way home, happily marched at the front, spilling a lot of the water from her jug. Krul and I quietly followed behind.

Our morning routine finished, we made some preparations as the rest of the

family completed their own waking routines. Then, we decided to head out to collect our prey. We were a big family and we had Krul by our side—as such, not all of us were technically needed to drag the boar back. Regardless, going to the lake with everyone like this was a nice change of pace, and it felt more like we were on a picnic. Dappled sunbeams shone down on us as we strolled through the forest. Since we were under the canopy, we avoided direct sunlight, and the breeze was still cool and refreshing. Even so, it felt like the days were starting to grow warmer.

“I knew it was getting hotter, but you can really feel it when you’re outside,” I remarked, feeling sweat start to prick at my skin.

Rike, who was carrying an axe, nodded. “True. But it’s always hot when we’re in the forge.”

Our workshop was always scorching since we required an extreme heat source to bring metal to temperature. In a sense, we’d been forced to adapt to that heat, so we’d built some resistance toward it, but it didn’t mean we were immune to the changes in weather.

“It’ll get much hotter soon,” Samya said. I certainly didn’t doubt her when it came to information about this forest.

“I don’t want it to be so warm outside of the workshop,” I muttered.

Even if I was used to it, I didn’t enjoy particularly hot areas. I took a break from the heat of the forge every once in a while, stepping outside to cool off. However, if the weather was hot too, it would drastically decrease my work efficiency. *Maybe I should make a mist shower or something. Or I could at least build a regular shower. One day, I also want to create a mechanism that can boil water by using excess heat from the firebed and forge.*

There was a problem I needed to solve before that though: I needed to secure a method for obtaining a large amount of water at once. Since we now had gardens to tend, I guessed it was time to seriously consider digging a well. Though I could create the tools for digging, there was no guarantee that we’d find water in an ideal location. And if we couldn’t dig for water, we’d need to gather it from the lake.

In my previous world, there’d been a TV show that’d introduced a deserted

island with an aqueduct. *Maybe we could do something similar.* But that structure seemed time-consuming to build, and time expended was something we couldn't avoid. If possible, I wanted to successfully dig a well.

As we walked, I continued to think of ways to fight against the heat and claim a water source.

"There shouldn't be a place as hot as the workshop. If there was, all the trees and plants would wilt," Anne replied a bit wearily. Since she was our newest family member, she wasn't used to the heat just yet.

"There are places like that," I replied. "Some regions are filled with only sand and rocks because of the intense heat."

"Really?"

That incredulity came, unexpectedly, from Helen. I'd assumed she had traveled all around as a mercenary—she should be familiar with a desert, right?

I nodded in response and proceeded to explain to her about dry biomes. Everyone, including Krul and Lucy who probably didn't understand, listened intently.

We idly proceeded through the forest, getting a breath of fresh air, and soon approached the lake where the hunting party had submerged their prey. Lucy stood excitedly by the water's edge.

"If you jump into the lake again, you'll get washed clean again," I called out to her.

Lucy took a few steps back from the shore. Though she was fine jumping in of her own accord, she didn't like to be washed. Diana crouched down and gestured for Lucy to approach her, and the wolf pup obediently allowed herself to be carried. Lucy was a smart kid...though I may have been a bit of a doting parent.

Krul, Samya, Helen, Anne, and I combined our strengths to drag our prey onto the shore. When it emerged, I was met with the carcass of an enormous animal—the meat alone would easily weigh over two hundred kilograms.

"This is huge," I murmured.

“Right?” Samya said, puffing out her chest proudly.

Its organs had been removed when they’d killed it, as per the custom of this forest, but it was still extraordinarily heavy. I didn’t even want to imagine how much it’d weighed originally.

“I’m surprised you were able to kill it.”

My prior knowledge told me that large boars could run around without a care, even if they were injured. I’d even heard that they could keep charging after receiving a destructive blow to the spine, though that probably depended on the location of their injury.

“It’s all thanks to the tough arrowheads from Forge Eizo!” Samya exclaimed. “At this size, even the boar’s hide is tough, but your arrows are able to pierce through and bite deep.”

“Even so, something of this size is probably difficult to kill unless the arrow strikes a precise spot, no?”

“Well, that’s thanks to all of our skills.”

“Arf!” Lucy barked. She’d done her job well too. I was sure that the pup had run around the forest according to Samya’s orders, only jumping into the lake because the exertion had made her hot.

After the five of us took the boar out of the lake, we proceeded to drag it atop a carrying pallet. It was a lot easier to move on land, mostly due to Krul’s strength, but the boar was still very hefty.

As I lashed a length of rope to the pallet, I mumbled, “Maybe we should think about getting a cart for use in the forest.”

It could be a simple contraption with a leaf spring suspension system. If I built one with height in mind, it might just be usable within the forest. The main issue would be designing a platform to carry our cargo—we always constructed pallets by the lake out of cut and fallen timber, which we later dried and reused for other projects. However, if we were to create a permanent cart or wagon, we’d need to search for more wood.

I already had a couple of projects on the docket that would use our lumber

supply: I'd planned on creating a small corridor from the main house to Krul and Lucy's houses, and I also wanted to expand our bath. If we were to run out of wood, we'd need to search for more in advance while keeping the time requirements of the lumber drying process in mind.

Helen sighed. "As it stands, it's pretty tough to get our kills to the lake."

When my family was out hunting, they did not take a pallet or cart with them—this meant they had to drag their prey across the ground to the lake, and I wasn't ever there to lend my strength. Helen was strong, and if even *she* had some trouble during hunts, it was best to find a solution soon. This whole affair wasn't a onetime thing; we'd continue hunting for the foreseeable future.

Huffing and puffing, we managed to drag our prey out of the forest and to our cabin, taking short breaks in between. We made it back before lunch, but since we'd left first thing in the morning, this whole ordeal had been a time-consuming process. It seemed best to build some kind of wagon or cart for use in the forest.

The five of us proceeded to string the boar carcass up in a tree. From here, Samya, Rike, Lidy, and Diana would transform this animal into meat. They were used to the butchering process and were quick with their hands.

"That was fast," I said.

"You get used to it if you keep doing it," Diana replied, wiping off her blade.

I smiled. "True."

Nearby, Lucy seemed to be growing restless—Diana sliced off some of the boar and tried to teach Lucy the "stay" command with meat as a reward.

"Stay," Diana said.

"Arf!"

"Stay..."

Like the good girl that she was, Lucy sat patiently and stared at Diana. *Oh, but she's drooling a little.* I saw that Diana's expression was a little sad. *Looks like Diana feels sorry for Lucy... She has to stay strong against the temptation to just say "Okay!" and give in.*

After Lucy was still for a decent amount of time, Diana cheered, “All right! Good girl!” Lucy immediately chomped down on the meat. Neither had heard my internal worries as they conducted their training. In my previous world, I’d heard it wasn’t ideal to give raw meat to dogs, but the wolves of this forest were magical beasts, and I thought it best to let this slide.

Once Lucy had finished her meat, she started running around with Krul. All of us gazed at them, smiling. After finding a small bit of happiness in this scene, I went inside to prepare lunch.

I started by grilling some fresh meat that we wouldn’t preserve. This was one of the perks of the days when we brought prey home. During small celebrations and parties, we could only prepare our preserved meat—butchering days were the only times when we’d get fresh meat to grill and eat. If we held any larger celebrations in the future, I’d probably have to hunt the day before and prepare fresh meat on the day of, but there was no need for that for now. *I can’t have everyone carry a boar into Marius’s wedding.*

After lunch, we had our free time. Lidy and the others went to tend the farming plots, excited that they might be able to harvest a portion of their crops. Rike wanted to practice making knives—she ignited the furnace and firebed in the workshop. I decided to add some final touches to the knife I was going to give to Julie.

I was already done with the blade portion, and I just needed to craft the scabbard and the handle. Since this was a wedding gift, I wasn’t planning on making a wooden handle or a sword guard, but even so, this wasn’t an impractical blade. *I mean, it is practical since it’s a custom model. If needed, it could cut through anything.*

But according to Diana, Julie wasn’t particularly adept with a sword, so she was free to store it or decorate with it instead of using it daily. Marius, who’d used one of my custom blades before, would be well aware of its dangerous nature and cutting ability. I knew he’d be cautious with it.

I grabbed the wood for the scabbard and placed my blade against it to take some measurements. My cheats helped to vaguely measure the outside, and I carved it to be more precise. Once I’d prepared two planks of wood of the exact

same size, I shaved each plank to cover half the thickness of the blade and then sculpted it in accordance with the knife.

After I glued the two halves together, I let the flames of the firebed lick the wood, and a rugged scabbard was completed. I wrapped it tightly with a leather cord until the glue completely dried, then followed the exact same process to make the lid. The only difference between a normal scabbard was that this one had a hole for a rivet, but that was all.

I let it sit for an hour and then removed the leather from the scabbard. I'd need to let it rest for a full day until the glue hardened completely, but this was enough to shape the outside. I used my own blade to smooth out the sheath. Every time I pressed my knife against the scabbard, it made a swishing sound, and wood shavings fell to the floor.

A while later, the scabbard became smooth and round—it looked like a prop often seen in *yakuza* movies.

“Hm,” I murmured, staring at the scabbard.

I had no complaints about its quality, but I thought it might be better to decorate the outside a bit more. I didn't need to follow the customs of my former world, and even if it was a bit different from the traditions of this world, I could just use the excuse that I was trying my best to adapt to another culture.

“All right,” I said, rolling up my sleeves.

I took my knife and used my cheat abilities to carefully engrave a relief of a rose into the sheath's surface. My cheats allowed me to know how deep I could dig in my blade tip, shortening my work time and preventing me from making mistakes. But since the relief I was carving was intricate, the process still took a lot of time.

By the time the sun started to set, I'd finished the engraving on one side. I raised the scabbard to bask in the orange light of the sunset, and before me, a rose was blooming on the wood, petals full and open. It had a mix of aesthetics—Western yet Japanese—and I found it quite charming.

“Hm.”

“Ah, are you done?” Rike asked, noticing me holding the scabbard in the air.

“Yeah. I think we can call it finished for now.”

I handed the scabbard over to Rike and she gazed at the wood grain intently. “You’re amazing, Boss. If you told me that this wood had naturally grown with this design, I’d believe it.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

I’d only done what I could with my cheats, so her praise made me feel a little embarrassed.

“But...” I trailed off.

Rike looked at me questioningly. “You’re not satisfied with this?”

I nodded. “Not yet. I want to add some color to it.”

“Ah.”

We didn’t have any pigments or lacquer for these occasions. I’d never intended to make anything flashy, but I at least wanted to make the rose red. Though this would really make it stand out, I also wanted to paint the wooden scabbard and handle white. Overall, I just wanted to remove anything that made the gift look dark or menacing.

“Hm, do you think it’s a bit too late to ask Camilo?” Rike asked.

“He might have something, but I don’t know if we’ll make it in time.”

“We’ve already fulfilled the wedding ring order, and we do still have a bit more time until the ceremony. If they have colors in stock, perhaps we can buy some.”

“That seems to be our only hope.”

“If he doesn’t have any, we can try thinking of another way. Lidy might know some plants that could be used for dyeing.”

“Right.”

Since I was a blacksmith in the Black Forest, it seemed fitting for me to use plant dye. Rike and I discussed possible solutions as we proceeded to clean up the workshop.

“I see,” Lidy replied. “I don’t think we’re growing anything like that in the garden, but I’m sure we can find something in the forest.”

While we were having dinner out on the terrace, I’d asked her if she had any plants that could be used as dye. I was aware that indigo plants had been used to create indigo dye in my previous world, and I was certain that something similar existed here too. *I remember making dye from plants for my summer vacation homework.*

“What colors do you need?” Lidy asked.

“Red, green, and if possible, white.”

“White...”

Lidy took a moment to think. White pigment was hard to come by—the only possibility within this forest was to take some shells by the lake, heat them up, and make a *gofun* pigment. Since shells near freshwater didn’t have much lime, we’d need to gather a good number of them to produce any amount of paint.

“I think white will be difficult to come by in this forest. We don’t really have a lot of raw material for it,” Lidy said.

Another method was to find some limestone...but locating an outcropping in this forest would be a gamble. There was a slight possibility that the mountains I could see from afar contained limestone, but I didn’t want to come home empty-handed on the off chance that there was none.

“I think I’ll ask Camilo about the white pigment,” I decided.

“For red, I remember seeing a few plants that could work—the roots can be processed into dye. I think those would be useful. We have plenty of green wherever we go, so you don’t have to worry about that one.”

“I see.”

I mulled over her words. Since this was a gift from our workshop, I thought it best to use whatever we could from the forest. If we could at least get red and green from around here, that was good for me.

With that decided, I turned to Rike. “Are we done with our usual order for

Camilo?”

“We should be fine. We have more than enough entry-level models, and we don’t necessarily *need* to make elite ones.”

We were able to reliably supply Camilo, who was pretty much our only regular customer. *Soon, I should think about either expanding our inventory or giving everyone more days off.* In any case, our schedule had been set.

“All right—why don’t we go out tomorrow and search the forest for some resources?” I asked.

Samya and Anne started to look excited. Samya liked to be in the forest, and Anne had never experienced an outing since she was a new family member. She seemed to have high hopes. Krul and Lucy also reacted to my words and started running around. *I hope everyone can sleep tonight instead of being too excited like the night before a field trip.*

“Now that it’s decided, why don’t we retire early to prepare for tomorrow?” I suggested, polishing off the rest of my dinner.

###

The next morning, after my daily routine, we all gathered in the yard of our cabin. Krul and Lucy seemed to be the most excited, but Anne was restless too. We’d run into a bear in the past (which had resulted in Lucy joining the family), so we all brought along weapons for self-defense. Anne tried to leave with swords in both of her hands but we stopped her. My *Diaphanous Ice* was eye-catching, but Anne would stand out way too much within the forest with two swords.

She ended up bringing a much shorter spear in lieu of swords. She had a long reach; shorter weapons wouldn’t be an issue for her. We decided that Krul could carry anything we gathered—she now had a basket tied to each side of her body, and she looked happy. Lucy stared at this with envy, running circles around Krul, but she needed to grow a bit larger before she could do any carrying.

“All right then, let’s go!” I called out.

“Okay!” everyone cheered.

We set off into the forest. The dense trees were shrouding us from the recently harsher sunlight, and the wind was stronger than usual. The forest seemed to be trying its best to stay cool and refreshing.

“It’s windy here, unlike near the cabin,” I remarked. “Must be the tree cover. It makes things a bit chilly.”

“The winds are pretty strong during this season,” Samya replied.

I wonder if it’s like a difference in atmospheric pressure—after all, the grassy clearings and fields are exposed to more sunlight than the dense foliage of the forest.

“Isn’t it difficult to aim and fire arrows in this wind?” I asked.

“Well, yeah.” She shrugged and immediately patted her biceps. “That’s where our skills come into play. We’ve gotta take all that into account.”

“You’re amazing.”

“I sure am!” Samya stuck out her chest proudly. I felt that this was one of her good points; she wasn’t unnecessarily modest when it came to being praised. Everyone else smiled at her.

All of us idly walked through the forest, enjoying the changing views. We weren’t out on a hunt today, and even if we didn’t find the plants we were looking for, it was fine by me. However, this forest was filled with hostile animals, so it was essential to remain somewhat vigilant.

My other family members, perhaps having similar thoughts, peered around carefully. I felt like we could beat a small battalion. We had a master archer, a mighty mercenary, an expert swordswoman famous within the capital, and a powerful combatant proficient in multiple weapon disciplines. We also had an elf who could use magic and a bow, a wolf pup who’d turned into a magical beast, and if Krul used all her speed to charge in, she would certainly deal some major damage. Of course, I’d never allow my adorable daughter to do such a thing.

Rike was the only one who wasn’t really a fighter, but the others were much too strong. I shook my head, trying to rid myself of the implications of this terrifying situation. Lucy, who possessed the keenest nose out of all of us,

chased after a green squirrel (that couldn't be hunted for meat) and a foliage bird. She barked with gusto, suddenly scaring the animals and chasing them away. When they scampered off, she gazed sadly after them, whining.

It seemed that Lucy had just wanted to play with them. *If she'd remained in the wild instead of joining our family, would she have tried to hunt them instead? Or will that instinctive urge awaken as she matures? If her nature as a magical beast bubbled to the surface of her personality, would I be prepared?* Right from the start, I'd known that I might have to kill her one day...but as I've spent more time with her and watched her grow, I've felt my resolve waver. How would Diana, who was steadily beating up my shoulder over Lucy's cuteness, feel about that? I didn't want to be the only one to hesitate when the time came. *No, I shouldn't think like that—for now, I need to enjoy the time I have with Lucy.*

"Ah, there it is," Lidy said, pointing. We'd trekked through the forest for a while when she suddenly spotted a shrub with a flower.

We approached the foliage to take a closer look. It honestly resembled tall grass more than it did a shrub, though it had an extremely thick stem. I'd judged it as grass because it lacked the bark typical of a shrub or bush, but this was the Black Forest—unusual species were abundant.

"We can boil its roots and dry the liquid we extract to make a dye," Lidy explained.

"Huh." I perked up with interest.

"Why don't we take that large one?"

I did as I was told and dug up the largest plant. A clump of thin roots emerged from the ground, resembling the structure of tree roots. They didn't look red to me, but the madder plant in Japan—which had yellow roots—could produce a dark-orange dye.

"Could you try cutting its roots?" Lidy asked.

"Like this?"

I selected a single root and swiftly sliced into the surface with my knife. I heard someone let out a gasp. The open cut exposed a bright-red interior,

dripping almost bloodred like an open wound. I'd never seen the cross section of a madder before, but I doubted it had a color this vibrant. The root in my hand looked more scarlet than simply red. *It's just a really bright, rich crimson color.* From the plants to the animals, there were many things in this world that were different from my former one.

Lidy looked satisfied. "If it's this red, it should be good enough. Let's take this one."

"Do different roots produce varying degrees of red?" I asked.

She gave a silent nod, then said, "They do. If the plant hasn't matured yet, its red coloration would be much lighter. The more it matures, the redder it gets. Let me see... I think this root is around three years old."

"That old?"

She gave another nod, and I immediately felt guilty for digging up something that'd been in the soil for so long. But this cycle was a part of nature, and it wasn't out of the norm for this world.

"I think this will produce more than enough to color the wood," Lidy concluded.

I bobbed my head in agreement then brushed off some dirt from the roots and placed the plant in one of Krul's baskets.

"*Kululu!*" she cried happily.

"You're such a good girl. Help me out today, okay?" I asked, gently patting her neck.

"*Kulululu!*" This call was louder, almost like she was displaying her confidence. Everyone laughed.

"Since we're all the way out here, we can forage for some delicious-looking fruit and the like," I suggested. "It can even be stuff you want to plant in our garden."

Everyone immediately perked up at my words—Lidy's eyes in particular were twinkling with excitement, signaling that something had caught her attention. Lucy probably didn't understand what was going on, but she furiously wagged

her tail when she saw everyone looking happy.

“But don’t get carried away!” I called out. “We don’t want to burden Krul too much.”

Krul huffed with pride, conveying that she’d be just fine. I patted her neck once more.

Hmm...

“Krul, did you get a little bigger?” I asked.

“Kulu?”

It felt like I had to raise my arm higher than usual...but I could’ve easily been imagining things. Krul gave a cute questioning tilt of her head. I wasn’t sure how to tell a drake’s age, but if she was still young, she’d have plenty of room to grow. Cats were apparently fully mature after about a year, and I still had another daughter that would certainly grow larger. Even humans continued to grow after their growth spurt. *And no, I’m not referring to that awful stuff that grows around my stomach when I eat too much.*

There was a huge difference between our home and other places: the density of magical energy. The Black Forest was thick with magic, and Forge Eizo was built in an area with especially condensed energy. It wasn’t absurd to think that absorbing this energy in excess would affect Krul’s growth. Lucy was growing by the day, but she was still clearly a pup. Though, she might’ve been hitting her growth spurt... The magical effects of the Black Forest were hard to pin down. The wolves of this forest were around a hundred centimeters tall. If she grew much larger than that, then we could suspect that the forest’s magic had caused it. *I should probably watch over our daughters’ growth in more ways than one...*

“Oh, why don’t we take that one, roots and all?” Lidy called out. She pointed to a plant with thick, succulent leaves. “It’s effective against burns.”

Is it like aloe? Even the plant’s shape seemed to resemble aloe, but in my previous world, aloe vera also had some adverse effects. My installed knowledge informed me that this aloe-like plant did indeed work well against burns.

“It might be good for us to have around,” I remarked.

“Yeah.”

Though we handled items at extremely high temperatures every day, we’d been lucky so far—none of us had ever suffered more than second-degree burns. But minor burns were a daily occurrence, and while most of them didn’t leave any scars, it was best to treat and heal the injury quickly. Other than me, everyone at the forge was an unmarried young woman. As such, they were worried about their skin, so there was no such thing as having too much of this medicine.

Helen, Anne, and I dug up the plant that would work against burns. Since we planned on planting this in our garden, we dug deep, but the roots were so long that we still cut off the ends.

“Hup!”

We kept some dirt around the roots for replanting and slid it into the basket opposite the red root. We should’ve probably preserved the aloe-like plant’s entire root system, but Lidy didn’t seem to have any complaints. *I guess it won’t be an issue as long as we quickly replant it.*

“I do end up sweating if we move around a bit,” Anne admitted. She was carrying another root and fanning her face.

While the cool breeze was refreshing, the temperature was indeed rising. Just like when I was forging, I wished to know the current temperature in digits. However, my cheats didn’t actually allow me to know the exact temperature; I only knew the right moment to take a metal off the heat. Frankly, even if I did know the temperature, it would only confirm that it was pretty comfortable out, and honestly, I didn’t really need my abilities to discern that.

“We should’ve brought a towel and a change of clothes,” I said. “You guys could’ve taken a dip in the lake.” None of us had bathing suits, but I was already familiar with the scene of them frolicking around in the water.

“But you’d be left out, Eizo,” Helen pointed out.

I nodded. “Well of course.”

I was internally forty, and I had the body of a thirty-year-old man. I couldn't bring myself to mingle with these young ladies.

"We shouldn't do it without you," Helen insisted.

Everyone else seemed to agree. Even Krul and Lucy cried out to voice their concurrence.

I sighed. "Fine. If we can find a type of clothing that doesn't become transparent when wet, then we can all play in the water together."

"Huh. Does the Nordic region have clothes specifically for playing in the water?" Helen asked.

"Nope. But if something like that exists, we can all swim, right?"

"Jeez..." She looked at me wearily and slapped my back. I yelped in pain, but the seed of that idea had been implanted in my brain, and I hoped that one day we could all play in the water without a care.

"Should we have lunch around here?" I suggested.

We had spent a couple of hours wandering around, and now we were next to a river where we'd gone fishing multiple times in the past. When I looked up to the sky, the sun was already inching toward its zenith and shining its harshest rays down upon us. This riverbank seemed to be a decent place to have lunch. Krul, Lucy, and everyone else voiced their agreement and we quickly settled down.

Anne seemed particularly reflective about this outing. "I never really experienced stuff like this in the empire."

"I thought aristocrats and nobles went hunting in forests and mountains," I said. "Didn't you ever have tea on the grassy plains or something? Isn't it important for you aristocrats to socialize?"

"Uh..." Anne seemed a bit taken aback by my words. *Was I wrong?* "I won't deny that some people prioritize outings like that...but there's a huge difference between relaxing with your family and socializing with aristocrats who you're technically at war with."

“Ah... Fair enough.”

I couldn't imagine the emperor saying, “Since we're free today, why don't we go on a picnic with your mother, Anne? Ah, and why don't we bring along Harriet too?” *No, wait, I think I could imagine that. I feel like he might actually say something along those lines.*

Anne may have felt a little out of place because she didn't do stuff like this often. Since her family was leading the empire, it was only natural that they didn't have much free time to begin with, even if they could rely on people around them.

“Sorry,” I said meekly.

She gave a nonchalant wave of her hand, a gesture I'd never seen her do before.

“What's that?” I asked.

“You do it often, don't you, Eizo? I'm just copying you.”

“Ah...”

So I guess there isn't a problem. The gesture was meant to convey that one didn't need to worry about something...but apparently, out of habit, I did it often. I was a bit embarrassed that an outsider had picked up on my mannerisms so quickly—I decided to keep that in mind for future interactions.

And so, after lunch preparations were made, we sat in a circle and put our hands together.

“*Itadakimasu.*”

“*Kululu!*”

“*Arf!*”

Today's lunch was something resembling a sandwich. It was similar to the stewed meat burger I'd made in the past, but this time, I'd added rehydrated roots and raw herbs from our garden into the mix.

“Delicious!” Samya yelled.

She was a huge fan of food like this. In the past, Diana had secretly told me

that Samya always looked forward to the lunches I prepared for their hunts. Needless to say, I'd continued to improve my cooking skills ever since. After all, Samya had hunted the meat for us—the least I could do was make something tasty out of it.

We also had mint tea brought from home. It had cooled off, but the lukewarm temperature was perfect for a warm day like this, and the mint added a refreshing taste.

After downing my first cup, I muttered, "If we'd used a metal container, we could've submerged it in the cold river to further cool down the tea." That way, we could've enjoyed this like iced tea; it would've taken some time to chill, but that could be a different way to enjoy it.

"Now, now, I think this is just fine," said Rike, breathing a sigh after she finished her own cup. I didn't know whether it was because she was a dwarf, or if it was a simple matter of personal taste, but she didn't seem to enjoy cold foods.

"I guess we should try digging a well before it gets any warmer."

The bottom of a well was much cooler than the surface, and if we wanted to keep items cold or cool something down, we could place fruits or water belowground to enjoy whenever we wished. Even if we couldn't dig a well in time for this year, we'd need it the next—I also still hadn't given up on preparing a bath.

"It will give us a better water supply too," Lidy pointed out.

"Yep. You won't be troubled by the lack of water for your garden."

The elf nodded, showing that currently, she was most interested in water for the farming plots. Perhaps it was because she wanted the elves' seeds to grow well, but I couldn't suppress a smile.

"All right. I'll prioritize it as much as I can," I promised.

"Thank you," she replied softly.

Guess I gotta work on that too... I gazed lazily at the riverbed. Samya and Helen, who'd finished their lunch, were playing tag with Krul and Lucy. The river

didn't offer solid footing, but the four were darting around so speedily, agitating the water like a butter churn. *One of them is part tiger, after all.*

"Don't run around too fast and trip or fall into the river!" I called out.

"Okay!" the two people replied. Krul and Lucy gave their own affirmations.

With a small sigh, I poured myself a second cup of tea.

After our lively lunch was over, we resumed our walk through the forest. The flowing river where we'd picnicked had cooled the surrounding area, so now that we'd departed, I felt the heat even more intensely.

"Will it get hotter?" I wondered.

Samya nodded. "A bit more, yeah."

"I see..."

Though I was usually able to stay cooped up in my heated workshop, I felt myself wilt at her words; I actually wasn't too resilient against the heat. Rain didn't fall much around here, so our only saving grace was that it wouldn't become hot *and* humid. There would still be some moisture though—we were living in a forest, and because the soil required a certain amount of water, we couldn't experience a drought or a total lack of rain.

Technology had advanced in my previous world, allowing me to tolerate some harsh temperatures, but if I had to deal with those same levels of heat and humidity right now... Well, the prospect sounded tough to deal with.

"The hottest temperatures only last for a week or so," said Samya. "After that, it'll cool down again."

"So I just need to endure it for a week?"

"Guess so."

"That's a little reassuring."

If the heat stuck around for a few weeks, it would be unbearable...but a week was a period I could endure.

"Is it different in the Nordic region?" Samya asked.

"Yeah. It's humid, and the heat stays for much longer."

“Huh.”

The Nordic region of this world was probably a bit different from modern-day Japan, but I’d be experiencing a different kind of heat for the first time in forty years. I was somewhat scared, but kinda excited too.

We continued to wander in the forest, foraging for some antibiotic and fever-reducing herbs along the way. These would be effective even when dried, and we’d never be troubled by having too many of them. I was told that we were growing some of these herbs in our garden, but it would take some time until they were ready to harvest.

As we walked around, Lidy suddenly rushed into a thicket. We all hastily followed.

“I found it!” she said, pointing to a certain plant. It looked like mugwort. “If you use these, you can achieve a beautiful green color.”

“Really?” I asked.

Helen tried to reach out and grab the plant, but Lidy stopped her. “If you carelessly touch it, the color will stain your hands for a while.”

Helen immediately drew her hand back.

“Gently cut it with a knife and put it in this leather bag,” Lidy instructed.

“G-Got it.”

With a flash of silver, the mugwort-like plant, root and all, was harvested. This speed could only be accomplished by Helen, who was more used to wielding a blade than any of us. She gently pinched the plant, as though she was touching an explosive, and gingerly placed it into Lidy’s bag.

“Great. Thank you.” Lidy tightened the string of the bag and tied it next to the basket on Krul’s side. She didn’t want any pressure applied to the plant since it could cause the pigmented juices to flow.

“And now we’ve got all we need,” she declared.

“Huh? That’s it?” I asked in surprise. We’d only collected one small bundle. I didn’t think it would be enough to get the color I needed, but Lidy gave a confident nod.

“This should be plenty. Many even dilute this color when dyeing fabrics.”

“It’s that dark, huh?”

In my previous world, it’d been surprisingly hard to dye things green. There were practically no plant-based sources that could seep into wood and give it a noticeable green hue. If the plant we’d just harvested could produce a color that was intensely pigmented, I hoped that the color would permeate the wood. *Are the squirrels in this forest green because they eat this plant?*

“All right, then our mission is complete,” I said. Everyone nodded. “But I don’t want to go straight home, so until the sun sets, why don’t we just forage for whatever we like?”

Krul and Lucy happily ran around when they heard my words.

A while later, as we were discussing possible plants to add to our garden, Lidy, Anne, and Helen suggested flowers.

“Flowers, huh?” I replied.

“Can we?” Lidy asked.

Flowers didn’t have any practical merits—they weren’t delicious or nutritious, and they couldn’t be used for medicinal ointments. However, they did have the power to soothe one’s soul. *My house doesn’t just belong to one old man, after all.*

“The forge is a bit too hot, so the arranged flowers might suffer,” I warned, “but why not? I don’t want the house to look so dreary all the time.”

“I’ll choose some sturdy flowers,” Lidy said eagerly, obvious delight in her tone.

“Sure. I’m not well-versed in flower care, so I’ll leave it to you.”

While my installed knowledge provided information on the types of flora, I couldn’t pull up the specifics on non-medicinal varieties—I was supplied only with vague details about what the plants looked like. Everyone except myself proceeded to look around and ask about the flowers.

“I wonder if we can find any plants from the west,” I murmured.

The west had a warmer climate in this world, and my installed knowledge told me that there were more deserts too. If it was similar to my former world, we might find fruits that didn't grow here, like bananas, though they would probably be more like ancestors to the fruits I knew.

If we could obtain fruits from that region, and I was able to create a system of boiling water from the heat of my forge, I could make a sort of greenhouse and cultivate those crops. *But we'd still have a couple of issues to account for. Namely, the temperature drop at night and whether the plants could get enough sunlight.* These problems would be resolved if we built a greenhouse with panels made of expensive, transparent glass, but even if we could get such luxurious material, we'd have to set it aside for a while. Still, I felt like obtaining new fruits would do us good in the future.

"I haven't heard much about western fruits in the kingdom," Diana said.

"Nothing from the empire either," Anne added. "I'm sure some have made their way here though."

"I see."

Their words were very convincing. Even if I asked Camilo, it'd probably be as difficult as obtaining soy sauce and *miso*. *I suppose I should probably prioritize acquiring items from the Nordic Region.*

The sun was starting to set, and the sky was dyed orange. I observed Krul carrying the blessings from this forest: medicinal herbs and leaves, roots for dyeing, flowers, and various fruits.

"Is all of it heavy?" I asked, stroking her neck.

"*Kulululu.*"

She gently stomped the ground and cried out, showing that she was all right. I smiled dryly and patted her neck.

"These flowers are pretty," I remarked.

"They're roses."

Krul's basket contained a few rose blooms on stems with the roots still attached. They weren't the type usually seen on Earth with multiple layered

petals, but a variety closer to ancestral roses—a beautiful flower with one layer of petals. Not only was it pretty to look at, but its fruit could be used as well; apparently, it had a sweet and sour flavor.

I didn't mind if these flowers were cultivated solely for our viewing pleasure, but Lidy and the others wanted to raise tenacious flowers that had multiple uses. I wasn't obtuse enough to ignore their goodwill, and I obediently agreed with their choices.

Guess it's time to head home. We should think about expanding the farming plots tomorrow. We chatted brightly about the plants we'd found today as we walked toward home under the reddening sunset.

Chapter 11: A Midnight Visitor

By the time we arrived at the cabin, the sun had long set. We might've stayed out a bit too late. Luckily, some of us knew magic that could conjure light, so we were able to unload the cargo from Krul and clean her up even after the sky had darkened.

We separated the plants that still had roots attached and shallowly planted them on one side of the garden, giving them a small bit of water. Though water might've not been necessary to keep them alive until tomorrow, I just wanted to be on the safe side. We tossed the herbs into storage—the rest would wait for morning. We quickly did what we could under the dim sky, and I went inside first to prepare dinner.

As I stepped into the cabin, I glanced behind me and saw Krul and Lucy running around. Perhaps they thought the busy buzz of our household chores looked like fun, or maybe they believed they were helping somehow.

While everyone was used to exercising, we'd walked for almost the entire day, so exhaustion claimed us quickly. We all immediately went to bed after dinner. Once I settled beneath the blanket, I felt my consciousness quickly fade away.

I didn't know how much time had passed. I didn't even dream about anything. But suddenly, I awoke, sensing a presence nearby. We didn't have a clock, so I couldn't tell the precise hour, but it looked to be the middle of the night.

I blearily cracked open my eyes and noticed a faint but firm knocking on the door. *Am I hearing things in my half-asleep state?* I soon realized this wasn't the case, so I hastily got up, conjured light in my hand, and headed to the door. As I approached, I heard the knocking grow louder.

"Be right there!" I called.

I quickly removed the latch and opened the door—in front of me was the chief of the fairies in the Black Forest, Gizelle.

“What’s wrong, Gizelle?” I asked. Then, I gasped. “Could it be...?”

Gizelle gave a small nod. She gestured behind her, and a fairy emerged, carrying an exhausted-looking friend.

“Let’s head to the workshop. Over here,” I directed.

I took the limp fairy in my hand and jogged toward the forge. When I opened the door, I was greeted with silence. I’d never experienced this workshop so quiet—it looked like even my tools were asleep.

“I’m sorry, but this is an urgent midnight task,” I mumbled to the room, placing my light down.

I draped a clean cloth over a table and gently laid the fairy on top. She seemed tired, but her breathing wasn’t haggard—in fact, she seemed to be taking weak, shallow breaths. However, I was afraid that her respiration would soon fade.

I wasn’t going to let this fairy slip away. At that moment, I was glad that I always kept a piece of sheet metal filled with magical energy—all I had to do was set up a simple energy forge and start hammering. Unlike when I worked on the rings, this time, there was nothing inside. Fortunately, we didn’t need to heat anything. If that’d been necessary, we would’ve had to light the firebed and wait for the materials to warm up.

Immediately, I began hammering away. I swung down again and again, using my cheats to imbue the box with as much magic as I could. I couldn’t open the lid and check, but I was certain that energy was condensing within. Since I wasn’t working on anything in particular, I didn’t need to worry about the shape, so I resolved to pump in as much magic as I could in the shortest amount of time.

A short while later, the *clangs* from the box turned into *clinks*. I set my hammer aside and called out to Gizelle. Though I was too focused to notice, the rest of my family had woken up. I hadn’t roused anyone since I could handle this myself, but I was sure that the noise from the forge was loud enough to snap anyone awake. It was equivalent to ringing a fire bell.

“Diana, Lidy, if my daughters wake up, please take care of them,” I said.

Krul and Lucy were very well-behaved and hadn't caused a fuss, but I knew they were awake. Diana and Lidy nodded and rushed out of the workshop.

"Okay, I'm opening the lid now," I told Gizelle.

She nodded, and I removed the plate. A bright blue light shone through the gloom of the dimly lit forge. It was radiant enough that we would've been able to see its glow in the light of day, so in the darkness of night, it seemed blinding.

A jewelstone about the size of a grape sat inside.

"Here you are."

"Thank you," Gizelle replied.

She carried the stone and literally flew to the limp fairy. She and the other fairy placed the stone atop the patient's stomach and held it there. We watched them for a while, and I noticed the sleeping fairy's frail breaths gradually calm. The moment I thought the worst had passed, the magical jewelstone faded away.

"Was it enough?" I asked.

I was prepared to immediately make another stone if necessary. Gizelle took the fairy's pulse, listened to her breathing, and placed a hand on her forehead. She then proceeded to sit down. *Is this bad?* I swiftly grabbed my hammer.

"She's fine now," Gizelle said.

Relief and joy filled the workshop. I lowered my hand and hammer, muttering a quick, "Thank goodness..."

"Thank you so much." Gizelle took a sip of herbal tea from the small cup we'd provided and breathed a sigh of relief.

The other fairy seemed glad too.

"I'm so glad her life was spared," Gizelle whispered.

"I am too." I took a sip of my own tea, which Diana had prepared. The tea seemed more flavorful than usual, but it was perfect for the current state of my tired body, which had worked throughout the night.

"In any case, I thought it would take a bit more time for someone to fall

completely ill,” I remarked. “This seemed pretty sudden.”

“Well...” Gizelle started.

According to her, a fairy would normally lose magical energy at a much slower rate, but for some reason, this fairy had lost her energy very rapidly. After the fairy had lost a certain amount of her magic, the deterioration had slowed, but she’d still been on the brink of death, so Gizelle had hastily brought her to me.

“So it’s not just chronic—there are fulminant cases too,” I murmured.

“Fulminant?” Gizelle repeated, unfamiliar with the word.

“Nothing. Just in case, I feel like the ill fairy and her friend should stay here for a bit.”

“How long?”

“Two to three days at minimum. If possible, maybe a week.”

“That’s quite a while.”

“Yeah. Of course, it’s up to them. I won’t force them to stay that long.”

This sickness didn’t seem contagious, but I thought it best to err on the side of caution. If the other fairy also had a fulminant case, it was best to take care of it quickly. This also meant that it was best if Gizelle stayed too...but she was the chief of the fairies and had a role to fulfill among her people. If one of the fairies here was indeed affected, I could send the other energetic fairy to contact the others and explain the situation. I didn’t want any relapses either. As doctors from my world would usually say, “We’ll watch over your condition for two to three days, and if you seem fine, you can leave.”

I explained my intentions to Gizelle, sounding rather like a doctor.

“I see,” Gizelle mused, placing a hand on her tiny chin. She was probably considering whether it was all right to have fairies stay at a human’s place (though I had a beastfolk, a dwarf, an elf, and a giantess with me too).

She may have also been wondering if the illness could spread to others. In our household, Lidy, Krul, and Lucy would be the most affected since they lived by absorbing magical energy. No one else had much magic in their bodies, so I figured it shouldn’t become a major issue.

“Deepika,” Gizelle said to the fairy who’d brought in the ill friend, “can I leave Reeja in your hands for a week?”

“Of course,” Deepika replied, pounding her chest with confidence.

Reeja was sleeping peacefully.

“Then I’m sorry to inconvenience you, but I shall leave these two,” Gizelle said, bowing her head.

I nodded. “No problem. If something happens to either of them, I’ll let you know immediately.”

“All right.” She nodded in return.

Our work as a fairy clinic had begun. But for now, we needed a break.

“Why don’t we all sleep for today?” I suggested. “I don’t have any fairy-sized bedding, but I do have an open guest room you both can use. Two, actually. Why don’t we put Gizelle and Deepika in one room, and Reeja in the other? Deepika, if anything happens to Reeja, please don’t hesitate to let us know.”

Deepika nodded.

“Thank you,” said Gizelle. “I’m really sorry to keep inconveniencing you so much.”

“Don’t worry about it. We’re all living in the forest, after all. This much isn’t an issue, and remember, we got paid in advance.”

I gave her a wink, though I knew the gesture didn’t suit me. She smiled anyway.

Helen was the one to carry Reeja. She gently nudged the fairy onto her palm. “Whoa...” she said quietly, her eyes twinkling. Reeja’s size and appearance looked exactly like a doll’s. I decided to overlook Helen’s actions for today as an act of chivalry.

And so, our midnight medical care came to a close—we went in twos and threes back to our rooms to sleep.

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The next morning, I woke up as usual. Well, to be precise, it was actually the

same day since I'd treated the fairy after midnight. Luckily, I hadn't been affected by the loss of rest. In my previous world, I'd frequently pulled all-nighters or come home past midnight—it never seemed to affect me much if I got less sleep for just a day. And in this world, my body was younger too.

No one else was awake yet, the fairies included. This was the norm. Our family usually started to wake up when I was out fetching water. Thinking that people might rise later today, I was quieter than normal when I made my preparations. When I stepped outside, our two adorable daughters were waiting for me as always.

"Everyone might still be asleep, so let's be quiet, okay?" I murmured, putting a finger to my lips.

"*Kulu*," Krul replied softly.

"*Arf*," woofed Lucy, following suit.

"You two are such good girls."

I petted their heads and handed them the water jugs. Krul and I carried two each while Lucy had one small jug. We headed for the lake.

When I returned, I saw that everyone was awake, including the fairies.

"Huh, you guys are up."

"We rose a bit later than usual, but not too late," Diana replied.

None of them looked particularly sleepy. It'd only been one night, and they were still young. Only Anne seemed a bit groggy, but since she was always like this in the morning, I couldn't tell if it was due to the lack of sleep. I asked if she was all right, but she only gave a nonchalant wave of her hand.

"This is just the norm for me. Don't you worry."

All right then. We all had breakfast as usual. As I'd expected, the fairies, who were mostly fueled by magical energy, required very minuscule amounts of food. They could eat if they liked, but the amount was about the size of my pinky nail. Since that was all they needed to keep them going for an entire day, they often went a day or two without eating anything. The myth of fairies living off nectar didn't seem that far off.

They also didn't like meat. After I stewed the dried vegetables, I took out a small portion before I added the meat. All of it was seasoned with the usual salt and pepper. The fairies' version of the meal felt lacking to me since there was no meat, but Gizelle, who had a taste from a spoon, seemed to enjoy it.

"It's delicious!"

The other fairies received the same dish. I didn't have cutlery or bowls for them, so I served the meal in small cups. I also apologized for not having spoons of their size.

"Oh, please don't mind us," said Gizelle as she sipped directly from the cup.

Hm, once everything settles, I guess I'll make some fairy-sized tableware.

During breakfast, we talked about Gizelle and the fairies' lifestyles. I expected each fairy to have their own roles because they were intelligent and social creatures, but they apparently rotated their tasks. Everyone took turns gathering food, mending clothes, and cleaning their homes. The only person with a completely different set of duties was the chief, Gizelle. She took care of unifying the fairies and assigning proper roles. They also regulated the trees in the forest. I wasn't sure about the details of that, but it seemed like forests that were untouched by humans were easy to trek thanks to them.

"Since it's easy for magical energy to remain stagnant in this forest, it's important for us to take care of the trees so that monsters won't emerge," Gizelle explained.

Both Reeja and Deepika puffed out their chests, showing that the fairies were proud of what they did.

"So you guys are like forest guardians."

"That's exactly it!" the three of them squealed with sparkling eyes. They would probably self-appoint themselves as such in the future.

I also told them that I'd done my fair share of cutting down trees.

"But it's a necessity for you, isn't it?" Gizelle replied casually. "You're living in this forest."

Well, if these guardians say it's fine, then I guess it is. Though, I was sure

they'd try to stop me if I suddenly tried to claim this land and deforest the area to create a city like the capital.

"Speaking of monsters and magical beasts—one of my daughters is one."

I hesitated to speak about her, but I didn't want to keep things hidden and break the fairies' trust. So, I nervously brought up the topic, and Lucy (who'd just finished her breakfast of meat and was lying down), looked at me quizzically while wagging her tail.

Gizelle approached Lucy. I was worried that Lucy might take a bite out of the fairy, or that Gizelle might do something to harm our pup. Our entire family watched on anxiously, and I approached the two, prepared to take Lucy's side should anything happen. Gizelle stared intently into Lucy's eyes—I considered separating them.

But then, Gizelle smiled.

"You're a very good child, aren't you?"

"Arf!"

Gizelle petted Lucy's head, and the latter wagged her tail excitedly. Gizelle turned to me, looking slightly troubled.

"Monsters will always be created. I'm very sorry that we can't keep it all under control."

"You're up against nature," I replied. "I think you're doing your best."

"But it seems she's being raised by wonderful parents. She'll be just fine. Ack! That tickles!"

Lucy licked Gizelle's entire head, and I breathed a sigh of relief. Diana and Helen seemed to be more reassured than me. If the fairies had ordered Lucy disposed of, those two would've jumped in and waged war to protect her. I was glad that we were able to avoid that situation.

It sounded to me like the fairies had given us permission to continue living in this forest. My mind at ease, I ate a heartier breakfast than usual.

After the table was cleared away, Gizelle departed. "I'll leave Reeja and Deepika in your care," she said with a bow before floating away.

We all lined up and watched her leave. Her tiny form seemed to melt into the forest.

“All right, then I guess we should get to work.” I gently rolled my shoulders and proceeded to the workshop.

Today, almost everyone would be making the usual: sheet metal and longswords. Only Lidy and I were deviating from that so we could color the scabbard for Julie’s knife. After a quick meeting, I turned to Reeja and Deepika.

“You two can go ahead and rest. I’m sure you’ll get bored if you just stay put in your rooms, so feel free to move around the house.”

The two fairies nodded. I wasn’t sure if Gizelle’s rank as chief allowed her to feel more comfortable around people, but these two ladies were a bit more shy. *Well, I doubt they’d normally be in the care of a human.* I hoped that, within a week, we might become friends.

“Ah, our daughters aren’t tied with leashes or anything—they wander around freely. They’re very good kids, so I doubt they’d do anything, but if Krul or Lucy makes you uncomfortable, please be careful.”

The two fairies nodded again and Deepika gingerly raised her hand.

“Is something wrong?” I asked.

“Could I stay and watch you all?” she asked.

I raised my eyebrow. “I don’t mind, of course. But it’ll get quite hot in here.”

We’d all be using the forge and firebed, and since Lidy needed to teach me about extracting dye, I’d need to boil some water. The heat and humidity would be sweltering. Our family had already gotten used to it, but I was uncertain if the fairies had felt anything like it before.

“That’s fine. I’m a little interested in what humans make, so I’d like to watch.”

“All right. Be my guest.” *It’ll be better if they stay within my view anyway.* I gave them a nod, and both fairies looked relieved. “But please hydrate. I’m sure you two will be fine, but I just want to be on the safe side.”

Fairies were mostly composed of magical energy—I wasn’t sure if they sweated, and even if they did, I had no clue if they’d get dehydrated. But I

chose to be cautious. I didn't want our guests to faint from dehydration immediately after recovering from an illness.

"We will." The two fairies nodded, and under their watchful gazes, the rest of us began working.

"Let's boil the root first," Lidy instructed.

"Okay."

I readied a pot, then brought in the root while I was waiting for the water to boil. It looked so red that I would've believed it to be the blood vessel of some animal. There was still some dirt clinging to it, so I washed the root with water. Red juices immediately started to flow.

Once the water came to a boil, I tossed in the entire root. The instant it touched the water, a vibrant red began to bloom.

"Whoa." I was unable to help myself when I saw the vivid color.

Lidy giggled. "It's a little shocking, isn't it? When I was young, it used to surprise me just as much. I still get a little taken aback sometimes."

"Yeah. This is amazing."

The water continued to grow redder still, and the root gradually lost its color, paling to yellow. When it turned almost completely yellow, Lidy removed it from the pot, leaving only the brilliantly red water. The hue resembled fresh blood more than wine.

"If we boil this down, we should be able to extract our paintable dye," she said.

"I see."

As I gazed at the pot, I heard gasps of surprise from behind me. I turned around and saw the two fairies staring at the water with interest. Reeja's shoulders slumped when she noticed my gaze.

"Oops. I'm sorry."

I offered her a huge smile. "Don't be. You can watch all you like."

The rest of my family peered at me oddly, and Lidy turned away, her

shoulders trembling. Apparently, they weren't used to me smiling like this.

"Thank you. What will you be using this for?" the fairy asked.

"You see..." I took out the unfinished wooden scabbard that was etched with a carving of a rose. "I'll be painting this flower red."

"Wow!" The two fairies looked on in awe.

Looks like I should do my utmost best on this one.

After the liquid had boiled off substantially, I transferred what was now red paint from the pot into a small bottle. The fairies lingered nearby and continued to watch. The red would've looked beautiful housed in glass, but unfortunately, I only had a small bottle made of unglazed pottery. I'd need to check the paint's viscosity from time to time to make sure it didn't dry out.

For the actual painting process, I decided to use the brush that was already in the forge. *Maybe I should make some brushes out of a boar's bristles or something.*

"Now that I know paint is available, maybe I should've designed the scabbard differently—perhaps black lacquer inlaid with gold," I murmured, dipping my brush into the red paint. "Or maybe I should've done the *raden* technique and added some shells."

Black probably wasn't the best color for a wedding, but if this blade was going to be used for self-defense, a black-and-gold scabbard or a dark scabbard with shells would've looked fashionable. I wouldn't, of course, even dare to do any of that to the meghizium rings. Regardless, I didn't have any of those materials on me now, so there was nothing I could do besides follow the design I'd already planned out. I was, however, tempted to try out those options on the sheath for *Diaphanous Ice*.

I gently placed my paint-filled brush onto the scabbard. The wood grain seemed to absorb the paint, and color started to transfer onto the carving. I wasn't using something like acrylic paint, but was instead literally dyeing the wood—as such, it was difficult to understand just how far the colors would bleed. Fortunately for me, I had my trusty cheat abilities by my side.

Still, I couldn't just haphazardly apply color. I carefully brushed the dye across

the rose, and when the entire flower turned faintly red, I set it aside to dry. For a more vibrant color, I'd need to repeat this process over and over.

Now that there was no longer water boiling, the temperature had gotten much cooler in the workshop. I still had plenty of time to kill while waiting for the rose to dry, so I decided to prepare the green paint.

Gently, so as not to stain myself with color, I removed the mugwort-like plant that was resting inside some cool water.

"Do we boil this too?" I asked Lidy.

"No, we'll wrap it in some cloth and squeeze out the liquid."

"I see."

I prepared a cloth I had no other use for, dipped it in some water, placed the plant inside, wrapped the whole thing in soft deerskin, and began to wring everything out tightly. I thought it was probably best to use a completely dry piece of cloth for this process, but since this plant's color was very strong, my method would prevent the cloth from absorbing all the green. Besides, Lidy had warned that the paint may need to be diluted anyway—water from the wet cloth would do that.

A small container sat underneath, ready to catch the droplets. After the first two or three squeezes, only the cloth seemed to turn green, but slowly, a couple of droplets started to drip into the container.

"This is pretty tough," I remarked.

Though I had a bit more muscle than normal people—and I squeezed the cloth with my full strength every time—much of my stamina was quickly sapped. *Maybe I should make a compressor. If I did, I could even obtain oil from the crops in our garden.*

While I was putting all I had into squeezing the cloth, Lidy and the fairies giggled together.

"It looks tough," Deepika said.

"Would you like to give it a try?" I asked.

"Can I?"

“Sure. But make sure to squeeze over the deerskin. If the color gets on your hands, I heard it won’t come off so easily.”

“Wow! Thank you!”

I held the fabric, and Deepika, her eyes sparkling with excitement, used her full strength to give it a squeeze. This process, however, required all my might, so unless the fairies could use their magical energy to make themselves impossibly stronger, they’d have a tougher time than me.

“Reeja, help me out!” she called.

“Okay!”

The two started to squeeze with everything they had, and... *Plip! Plip!* The green droplets started to drip into the container once more. But after a while, the dripping stopped.

There was quite a bit of paint inside the container now. Honestly, I wouldn’t have imagined that all of this had come from one small bunch of this plant. The paint was a vivid green, demonstrating just how special the plants of this world were.

“All right, this should be good enough,” I declared.

Deepika rolled her shoulders. She looked tired, but her face was filled with a sense of accomplishment. “Whew, that really was tough!”

“No doubt it must be more difficult for you two,” I said.

“Yeah, but it was plenty of fun!”

“Same for me!” Reeja said, raising both her arms with joy and playing around with Deepika. “Right?”

They looked like two dolls frolicking together. *Or like small flowers wavering in the breeze.*

“I guess it’s time to finish up this rose,” I said.

Selecting a new brush, I faced the scabbard. I dipped my brush in the paint, dyeing it green, and transferred the color onto the leaves of the rose. Since I was dyeing the wood grain, color would pop up based on the amount of paint

the wood absorbed. The rose petals hadn't become bright red in one go—they currently held only a faint hue.

However, the leaves turned bright green almost instantly. The color didn't blot out the wood grain, but I didn't think it would absorb any more green. *Dyeing the wood will never cover the wood grain anyway, so I guess the leaves only need one coat of paint.*

"The color's so dark," I observed.

"It is, isn't it?" Lidy said confidently.

I could now tell why she'd seemed so sure that the plant would produce an intense color. As I continued to paint, the vibrant green leaves stood against the soft red of the petals.

"Hm." *It might be best if the rose isn't vibrantly red.* I knew it would be pretty even if I couldn't find white paint later.

The crimson paint could be used for different things, and there was no need for me to finish the entire pot of red. Also, I knew the paint would wash off if exposed to water, so I needed to coat my work with some turpentine oil as a varnish. I was sure Camilo had something to protect the paint, so I was determined to ask about it the next time we saw him.

Reeja took a peek at the scabbard from behind me. "It's so beautiful!" she gushed, unable to help herself.

"Shhh!" Deepika scolded.

"Ah, sorry..."

Her mood withered, and I smiled.

"You don't have to look so bothered. If you fairies give your stamp of approval, I guess I can finish this up."

At that, Reeja beamed brightly. *This feels less like an educational field trip... Almost like a bring-your-child-to-work day.*

Seeing the two fairies fawning over the sheath reminded me of Gizelle's blessing. She'd said only that she had applied blessings to the rings, but I had no idea what a "blessing" truly entailed. So, I decided to ask Deepika and Reeja

about the specifics.

“By the way, Gizelle blessed some items for us—do either of you know any details about that process?”

“Details?” Deepika tilted her head to one side.

Maybe blessings don't come in different varieties? “Like...can a blessing protect someone from illness, or increase their luck with romance, or anything like that?”

“Ah,” she said, clapping her hands together.

Gizelle knows they're wedding rings, so I doubt she placed a blessing for finding future romance.

“I won't be able to tell what magic the chief used until I see the blessed items.”

“I have them close by, actually.” I took the rings down from the *kamidana*, set them on my palm, and showed them to Deepika. “These rings.”

“Let me see...” Deepika and Reeja peered at them. “This is a blessing to ward off disasters. It'll protect the wearers from any misfortune.”

“I see.” I pinched the rings and raised them into the air. As usual, they were glittering.

“It's one of the best blessings that our chief could give,” Deepika continued. “I'm sure anyone who receives it will be filled with happiness.”

“Is that so?”

It seemed the payment we'd received in advance was inexplicably good, though I knew I couldn't put a price tag on these rings anyway. Since I was able to purchase the safety of my friends, I certainly wouldn't mind treating other fairies for free in the future.

“Just to check... The misfortune that would've gone to the wearer won't be transferred to someone else, right?” After all, in my previous world, fairies were sometimes known to innocently play cruel tricks on people.

“Nope,” Deepika stated firmly. “It sounds like you humans are laboring under

a huge misapprehension.”

“Ah, no... I think it’s just me.” Since I sometimes called upon knowledge from my previous world, I often got confused by the vast differences. I’d expected the fairies of this world to be different, but I was still surprised.

“Not at all. According to our chief, there are humans who believe that fairies seduce people before carrying them away!”

“Ah...”

So even in this world, fairies were treated like that. I offered a strained smile, trying to calm the agitated Deepika. Once her anger had quelled, I moved on to my next task. While the bride would receive a gift from me, I thought it’d be a bit depressing if Marius didn’t receive one as well.

“Should I make another knife?”

He wouldn’t be out in public often, and his wife would likely always be flanked by proper armed guards, so a flashy blade for self-defense probably wouldn’t suit his needs. Besides, I’d feel bad if he had to repeatedly explain why he carried around a weapon like that. I also didn’t want him to receive requests for similar blades—it might be fine if Marius could reject the requests in my stead, but if he couldn’t, I’d be in trouble. After all, I didn’t particularly wish for fame. If I could work on what I liked without needing to worry about food, that would be just fine with me.

Since this was a gift, I could forge something that Marius could keep hidden until needed. Though it may have been boorish of me to say, I was sure he’d want it equipped. Marius was a gentle-looking man, but he was also a military officer who had his fair share of enemies. There was a good chance that the incident with his older brother, which I’d been involved in, had been triggered by someone who either disliked Marius or the margrave supporting him. As such, I was sure that Marius constantly thought about his safety.

After thinking it through, I decided that I wanted his weapon to be a normal-looking longsword or knife—something that wouldn’t attract anyone’s attention.

It would’ve been interesting to make the scabbard, the sword guard, and the

hilt with a Western aesthetic while forging the blade in a straight, Japanese style...but I didn't want him to toss aside his swordsmanship skills and have to adapt to a new weapon. *Ultimately, a custom model knife will be best.* I considered using mithril, appoitakara, or hihirokane, but I didn't want him to be easily identified if he ever needed to unsheathe his blade.

No, this knife would be made from steel, and I'd begin by pouring out a custom metal plate.

"Could I have a turn for a bit?" I asked Anne.

"Sure, okay," she said obediently, ceding me her spot.

They'd already melted steel inside the hanging ladle, and it was just waiting to be poured out. I could've tipped the ladle and poured the metal directly into some molds, but since this knife was to be special, I wanted to be a little more precise. I put on some leather gloves, placed molds and my tongs a short distance away, and positioned the smaller, cup-shaped crucible beneath the pour spout of the ladle. Tipping the ladle, I watched the melted metal flow into the crucible. When the scorching steel met the air, it raised the temperature around me, making it feel like the forge's heart was beating.

After pouring the steel, I swiftly lifted the crucible with my tongs. I gently tipped it over each of the molds, precisely filling them and making sure the surface remained perfectly level. The amount of steel one crucible could hold was enough for multiple molds, and I decided to fill them all. And though I only needed one solid steel sheet for a knife, I made sure to pour the rest evenly as well.

"Phew, this should be good," I said after I finished.

As the metal cooled, beautiful sheets of steel started to form. And because I'd poured them, there was quite a bit of magical energy present within each one. I gazed at the metal with satisfaction.

"Can you see the magical energy?" Reeja asked.

"Hm? Yeah," I replied.

"That's amazing! It's steel, but it's so pretty!"

I could only use basic spells, but it seemed natural for a magic user to be able to see magical energy. Apparently, the fairies had assumed that humans couldn't see magic at all.

Reeja looked at me with a wide smile, but Deepika sighed.

"Reeja, this person created a jewelstone of crystallized magic to save you," Deepika pointed out. "Of course he can see it."

"Ah, makes sense," Reeja replied with a nod.

I stayed silent. They weren't wrong, and I couldn't tell them about my cheat abilities.

Regardless, Reeja seemed enchanted by the scene. "I'm so envious. Humans can create wonderful stuff."

"It's not as if everything I make looks like this," I replied with a dry laugh. "And it's weird for me to say so myself, but these items are special."

Rike was on the side, nodding along to my words as she worked. *Apprentice, make sure to concentrate on your own task!*

Deepika sounded impressed. "I see. We use a little bit of steel occasionally, but I've never seen it filled with this much magic before. I can tell that your wares are special."

"Do you use steel for your weapons?"

She nodded. "That's right. We're in the Black Forest, aren't we?"

She gave a playful wink, and I laughed in response.

"You're exactly right. So, where do the fairies procure steel?" I asked.

I couldn't imagine them conjuring metal out of thin air, which meant that they had to gather it from someplace. If their trade deals were going smoothly, I had no intention of butting in, but if they had trouble procuring the ore they needed, I was willing to offer them some of ours. We were all residents of this forest—it would be easier if they didn't need to travel far.

"We request that the chief of the beastfolk bring some to us in exchange for small blessings," Deepika replied.

“I see.” Trade was circulating, even within this forest. *Makes sense. There was business here before I arrived.*

“However, we rarely use weapons, so we only place this request once every few years.”

“So you don’t need a lot to begin with.”

“Mm-hmm,” she said, nodding once more. “We only require enough to repair our weapons, and we rarely make new ones.”

Then I guess I don’t need to barge in. Forging weapons for the fairies would be like making blades for little dolls. It wasn’t impossible for *me* to do, but dwarves would probably struggle with the task.

“Ah, but if an opportunity arises, we might request for some steel from you. I can’t make that decision by myself though, so it’d be up to the chief.”

“I’d welcome your requests at any time.”

“Thank you.”

After that exchange, I flipped the mold to release the cooled steel plate and then picked it up with the tongs.

“As I thought, it’s so different,” Samya murmured, staring at the steel. She’d been in our household the longest, and even before Rike had arrived, she’d been pouring metal into molds to make sheets. By now, she was starting to learn what made the metal good or bad.

“Can you tell?” I asked.

“I can’t really put my finger on it, but I know it’s completely different from what we usually make.”

“This isn’t your profession, so it’s good that you can tell that much, especially given that you’ve only been working with metal for a short period.”

“You think so?”

“Yep, I do.” I didn’t expect everyone to produce sheets at the level that I could. I had my cheats to assist, and I didn’t think anyone could match this quality.

After selecting the sheet of metal, I went about my usual process for creating a knife: I shaped, straightened, quenched, tempered, and finally, sharpened. The only difference between this custom model and our usual goods was that it was filled with magical energy.

After shaping, and before straightening, I had to heat the metal and create a finer outline. I'd done this so many times in the past that I felt like I could perform this step with my eyes closed. However, I continued to stay focused.

The finished product was a double-edged knife that hardly required any smoothing. In addition, the sword guard and hilt were integrated into the blade, so they were already complete. I now needed a rasp to smooth away the very few rough spots that remained...but I decided to add one detail before that.

Setting the knife on the anvil, I took up my chisel and carved a small rose design into the blade—a motif matching the one on Julie's gift.

I debated giving the two knives matching scabbards, but I didn't want Marius's weapon to stand out, so I instead placed the matching insignia in an area that was difficult to spot. Since I'd carved a rose on Julie's scabbard, I had to mimic that design on Marius's blade—I'd chosen a difficult image, but I managed to make a single rose bloom on the knife.

"I think this should be good enough."

I placed Marius's knife, engraved with the rose, next to its mate—Julie's knife. The two blades, sitting side by side, looked like a married couple.

"Wow! They look splendid," Reeja said with awe.

"Thank you. It's my job, after all."

I'd recently taken on several different tasks, so I would occasionally forget...but my true profession was as a blacksmith. I didn't want to idly waste the talents that'd been bestowed upon me.

"Well, I'll be finishing this up," I said.

"Okay! I'll keep watching!" Reeja said enthusiastically.

Feeling her energy, I took the rasp and started to smooth the surface of Marius's knife. This process removed the hammer marks and the burrs from the

engraving—even my cheat abilities couldn't prevent those. Gradually, I swapped out the rasps to be of a finer grain, which polished the metal's surface. Now, all that was left was to sharpen the blade on a whetstone—this would shave off the rasp marks—and return it to the firebed.

Before I removed the knife from the firebed for quenching, I confirmed my surroundings. No one had gotten in my way while working, and since members of my household were usually aware of what I was doing, I wasn't too worried about them. However, today, I had two guests. The consequences would be dire if they touched the heated metal.

"I'm going to remove the blade and dunk it in this water. It's hot and dangerous, so please stay where you are," I said firmly.

The two fairies nodded their heads furiously. I returned my focus to the firebed and swiftly removed the blade. A loud sizzle hissed—steam rose in the air as the metal touched the water.

The fairies gasped. "Whoa!"

This was the most showy step in the knife-making process. I waited until the knife cooled and then slipped it back into the firebed to temper. After it got a little hotter, I took it out and waited for it to cool naturally. I glanced over and noticed the fairies standing motionless. They weren't completely safe, but now the most dangerous bit was over.

"You can move now, but the metal's still very hot, so be careful. I'm sorry I couldn't be more thoughtful."

"Don't be," Deepika said, clutching my hand. "I didn't think human blacksmiths did stuff like this."

"Do fairies use different methods?"

"It seems so. But I've never learned it properly, so I can't give you the details."

She looked a bit troubled. *Do they have their own secret techniques? Or maybe they just haven't developed their own process. Either way, that's intriguing.*

"If I ever get the opportunity, I'd love to watch," I said.

“Please do. But she’s a bit...difficult.”

A dry laugh bubbled out of me. It seemed that both human and fairy craftsmen were troublesome. I turned back to the cooled blade and wrapped some leather around the hilt to add the finishing touch. The scabbard wouldn’t be anything flashy, meaning it’d be the same as the ones I normally used for my orders—there was no need to create anything new.

And with that, the wedding gifts were complete. I could hand over everything to Camilo tomorrow alongside the rings.

At dinner, I suggested we go to the city.

“But then...what’re we gonna do about the two fairies?” Samya asked.

“Ah, right. What should I do...” I murmured.

I didn’t think it wise to leave the two here at the forge. But if someone were to stay with them for fear of the worst-case scenario, it would be me, and I was needed to fulfill our order at Camilo’s. *But I don’t want to take them to the city.*

While I was thinking of possible solutions, Reeja gingerly raised her hand.

“U-Um, is it all right if we tag along with you?” she asked.

“You’re...okay with that?” It was best if they came along, but fairies were even rarer than elves. I wasn’t sure what would happen when the townsfolk saw them.

Reeja nodded. “If it’s only for a brief time, we can make ourselves invisible.”

To demonstrate, she slowly faded away, and only a slightly glimmering, fuzzy Reeja could be seen. I was able to detect her because I knew she was there, but people who were none the wiser would only see a faint glitter.

When I told her as much, she gasped in shock. “You can see me?!”

“Really faintly. You’re practically invisible.”

“Even so, it’s amazing that you can!”

Is it? Reeja and I were both confused by this situation.

“Well, you can completely see magical energy,” Lidy chimed in.

“Ah, I get it.” As a required add-on to my smithing cheats (which allowed me to create extraordinary tools), I most likely needed the ability to perceive magic. The fairies had strong energy signatures, allowing me to see them. They apparently couldn’t make their magic disappear.

“I don’t think any normal person would be able to notice you,” Lidy added, “so I don’t think it’s a problem.”

“I can’t see you at all, but I can tell where you are,” Helen said.

Deepika looked at her with doubt.

“You’re just sensing her presence, aren’t you?” I asked.

Helen grinned. “Ah, you found me out.”

“Of course.”

Laughter erupted in the room. *It’s pretty amazing to be able to sense her presence though.* And so, the two fairies decided to tag along. They reassured me that they’d be fine, but I couldn’t stop myself from internally praying for everyone’s safety.

Chapter 12: The Fairies Head to the City

The next morning, after I finished fetching the water, Lidy and the two fairies headed outside.

“Morning,” I said.

“Good morning,” the three replied, turning around.

“Since you three are together, are you gathering magical energy?”

“That’s correct,” Lidy replied.

The fairies seemed hesitant to reply. They stared at Lidy, who’d answered in their stead.

“Eizo knows, so it’s fine.”

“I see,” Reeja said, sounding relieved.

I treated you in your dying state with magical energy. It’d be weird if I didn’t notice that magic was involved with you guys... But I guess I might think that you just healed somehow.

Take medicinal herbs for example—a person could know that a certain herb was effective against an ailment, but they might not know what compound in the plant constituted the cure. Magic could be much the same, and someone could know a healing spell without understanding why or how it worked. In my previous world, when I caught a cold, I didn’t exactly know how the medicine cured me...and sometimes I couldn’t even tell whether it had a direct effect on my illness or not.

“Makes sense that you’d want to gather some energy. After all, we’re going to the city today.”

“Right.” Lidy nodded. “That’s why I decided to invite these two.”

“Gotcha.”

Unlike the Black Forest, the city had almost no magical energy. This energy

was food for Lidy, Krul, and Lucy, but it was more like a life source for the fairies. I worried that it might be hard for the faeries to be in an environment with little magic, so I voiced my concerns.

“It’s a bit tough if we’re out for a week or two, but a day should be fine. Humans won’t die if they skip meals for a day, will they?”

That wasn’t wrong, but humans would absolutely get hungry without meals for an entire day. Some might even fall ill. It was best to prevent these scenarios as much as possible, so I was determined to head straight home after I finished my business with Camilo.

We finished breakfast and piled the items into the cart. I put the two rings in a bag and placed them in a small box, separate from the two knives. After the cargo was loaded, it was time for the humans. Everyone, including Lucy, jumped in, and the two fairies floated aboard.

Lucy stared at the fairies while wagging her tail. She didn’t seem wary, but more curious about their existence.

“Don’t scare our guests, all right?” I warned.

“*Arf.*” She replied as though she knew.

I was glad she was so well-behaved. The two fairies saw us converse and waved their hands to Lucy. She, in turn, wagged her tail even harder.

Since we were still in the forest, there was no need for the fairies to turn invisible. The two were chattering excitedly, as it was their first time riding in the cart.

“Drakes are so fast!”

“The cart doesn’t shake as much as I’d thought!”

Krul’s speed and the stable cart were a bit different from the usual, but I didn’t want to put a damper on their excitement. Even Lucy seemed to be in high spirits for some reason. I gazed at the scene fondly. I only had two daughters (both not exactly human), but I wondered if this was what it was like to have a child close to the human species. Krul continued to pull the cart through the forest until finally, we rolled onto the road that led to the city.

The two fairies gasped. “Wooow!”

Right, there aren't any grassy plains in the Black Forest—just a big lake and a small area where the trees don't grow. It's nothing close to this vast clearing. The two had never in their lives seen scenery like this, and their eyes sparkled with joy. I was already used to the view along the road, but their awe reminded me that in a different position, familiar sights could leave a refreshing and touching impression on the heart. I felt a bit embarrassed.

“We'll pass by people every now and then, so be sure to keep yourselves hidden,” I said.

“All right!”

They had to hide twice when we passed carriages, but otherwise, they were able to stare at the grassy plains for the rest of the ride to the city gate.

“We'll arrive soon, so please disappear for a moment,” I instructed.

“Okay!” Immediately, the two fairies turned themselves invisible.

I was still able to vaguely make out their magical energy. Lucy sniffed around them before she curled up by Diana's feet. She seemed to understand that though the fairies couldn't be seen, they were still there. Lucy was a magical beast, but she wasn't adept at sensing magical energy. Still, I thought she was highly intelligent if she was able to sense that the fairies had only gone invisible. *Am I just being a doting parent?*

I raised my hand toward the guard at the gate, and they nonchalantly raised theirs back. *Already familiar with us, I see.* As we got into the city proper, Lucy, who was curled up by Diana, woke and gazed outside. I could tell that the two faintly visible fairies had moved to either side of the pup.

“Wow, there're so many people.”

“Amazing...”

“I've never seen anything like it.”

“Me neither!”

The two fairies whispered to each other. Lucy couldn't see them, but she was

happily wagging her tail. She saw the scary-faced man at one of the stalls and gave an energetic bark. The two fairies, perhaps shocked by this, wavered their invisibility magic for a brief moment. It only lapsed for a split second, and only part of them could be seen—I guessed that most people would simply chalk it up to their eyes playing tricks on them.

The man reacted to Lucy's bark and waved back, but he didn't seem at all surprised. He didn't notice the fairies. If any humans, dwarves, or elves who were adept at magic had been present, it would've been a different story...but that wasn't likely here.

"Whew, that scared me," Deepika whispered.

Lucy lowered her tail and whined sadly.

"Oh, I'm sorry, girl! I'm fine, promise." I saw the fur on Lucy's head move slightly, and I guessed that she was being petted. Lucy regained her energy and wagged her tail once more.

"We probably shouldn't show them to the apprentice," I muttered.

"We shouldn't. He'd be too surprised," Diana said.

"Right." I'd get no joy out of shocking that innocent-looking boy. It might be a different story if he were older, but that would take some more time.

"I'm planning on having them meet Camilo though."

"That's for the best. He can help if needed."

"I'd like to do what we can for the fairies, but if they require items we can't obtain, we've got no choice but to rely on him."

Diana nodded. Ultimately, I wanted to become practically self-sufficient in the forest, but I knew that I'd still need to rely on others. Salt was a good example. It would be great if we could stumble upon rock salt somewhere, but for now, I had no choice but to purchase it. If I needed anything pertaining to fairies, time was of the essence—I didn't want to waste time explaining their existence to Camilo when an urgent matter arose.

Today was a perfect opportunity. We had some time to spare, and the two fairies were with us, so it was easier to prove my story. *But of course, only if*

these fairies give me their consent. I decided to ask them before we reached Camilo's store.

"That's fine by me," Reeja said energetically. I could only faintly see her.

I didn't think she'd accept so easily. "Are you guys not hiding your existence or something?" I asked.

"Not at all!"

"Gotcha..." *Guess I worried about it all for nothing.*

"But it's not good to be *too* well-known," Deepika added. "We're conscious of the fact that sightings of our kind are rare."

"I see."

As a means of protecting their race, they never ventured to the grassy plains, even though they could turn invisible. Deepika and Reeja were friendly and casual, making it easy to forget, but conservative fairies certainly wouldn't tag along so easily.

"I promise that the person you're going to meet is very good at keeping secrets. He won't reveal you guys to others." No blabbermouth could become a successful merchant.

"I understand," Deepika replied, sounding a little nervous.

And so, we finally arrived at Camilo's store. *We can greet the apprentice like usual, but how should I introduce the fairies to Camilo?* I gazed at the familiar view in front of me.

"Once we leave the carriage, please make yourselves invisible and follow me," I whispered.

"Okay," the fairies whispered back. Had they just nodded, I wouldn't have been able to know if they understood my words.

We placed our cart in the shed as usual, but the fairies couldn't suppress their gasps of surprise. An employee working there looked up dubiously for a moment upon hearing their voices. Lucy, perhaps actually having a good understanding of the situation, gave a well-timed yawn as a cover, and the employee smiled before returning to work.

I made sure to bring the rings and the pair of blades with me. Krul and Lucy were free to do as they pleased, and they headed to the backyard. The apprentice was waiting there—he gave a smile when he saw my two daughters.

“I’ll leave these two in your care,” I said.

“Of course! Please do!”

Krul and Lucy had gotten attached to him by now, and they rubbed their heads on his face and shins. Taking in the wholesome scene, I headed into the meeting room as usual. The fairies continued to voice their awe and astonishment as we walked inside. Though I had a large house in the forest, it was nothing compared to a merchant’s store, much less a luxurious one with a proper meeting room to conduct business. I hoped that this experience would broaden their horizons and expose them to other cultures. Even after we entered the room, the gasps of wonder didn’t stop. *This room does have beautiful tapestries and luxurious carpets to welcome guests.* These grand displays of wealth were wasted on us, but I was certain there were many occasions where the opulence was useful.

“Do fairies not have stuff like this?” I asked.

“Even our chief’s residence isn’t this luxurious.”

It sounded like each fairy had their own house. A fantasy setting where fairies lived in mushrooms flashed through my mind, but I guessed that they actually lived in small homes like dollhouses.

“If I can make something fairy-sized, perhaps I’ll gift it to Gizelle,” I murmured. “I don’t know when that’ll be, though.”

Making small items seemed good for gaining experience. But there were plenty of items that I had to and wanted to create before that—I really wasn’t sure when I’d ever get to it. I could make furniture, but before I gave any away, I’d need to place some around the house so that fairies could stay at the cabin in comfort.

“That sounds lovely,” Deepika said. “I’m sure the chief would be ecstatic.”

I couldn’t see her expression since she was invisible, but her voice sounded happy.

“Ah, here they come,” I muttered.

A knock sounded at the door—Camilo and the head clerk immediately strolled in. I nonchalantly raised my hand in greeting.

“Hey.”

“Heyo. How are things?” Camilo asked.

“So-so. Not good, not bad.”

“Like usual then?”

“Guess so.”

Camilo and I grinned at each other.

“Got the usual goods too? Nothing different?” he asked.

“Same old.”

“And what about the requested items?”

“I’ve got them with me, of course.” I took out a small box and handed it to him. He opened the box and held the faintly glimmering rings in his hands.

“Splendid. You even added some details to the meghizium. I would’ve been troubled if you’d asked me to sell these,” Camilo said with a laugh. He quickly noticed a vexed expression on my face. “What’s wrong? Any problems?”

“Not really a problem, per se...” I was a bit unsure about how to steer this conversation, but I thought being honest was best. “Those rings have been blessed by the chief of the fairies. The magic will protect the wearers from misfortune. I’ve been told that it’s one of the best blessings that they could give.”

Camilo seemed genuinely surprised. The head clerk, who usually remained composed, seemed equally stunned.

“I didn’t mind keeping this a secret, but I thought it best to tell you guys in case something happens.”

“You were right to let us know, but...” Uncharacteristically, Camilo seemed at a loss for words.

“And, well...” I paused for a moment. “I guess I don’t mind if the head clerk stays here.”

“Me?” he asked.

I nodded, and he stared back at me, befuddled—a rare sight to see. He probably wouldn’t have expected anything more shocking than this. *I would’ve thought the same if I was in their shoes.*

“You two can come out now.”

The pair of fairies suddenly flickered and became visible. Perhaps feeling a little nervous and shy, they tried to hide behind me.

“These two fairies are called Deepika and Reeja. Some stuff happened, and they’re staying with me for now.”

The pair of fairies quietly bowed, but Camilo and the head clerk stared goggle-eyed, their jaws agape.

“Anyway, I can guarantee that the blessing from the fairies is the real deal.”

The two seemed to be frozen in place until the head clerk finally cleared his throat, causing Camilo to follow suit.

“*Ahem*,” Camilo said oddly, trying to regain his composure. “Pardon me. Eizo, I knew you were anything but ordinary...but I never expected something like this.”

“That sentiment isn’t exactly new, is it?” I replied.

“Well...that’s true. You’ve got a princess from the empire staying with you, after all. You’re anything but normal.” He proceeded to cradle the rings more gingerly and carefully than before. “You’ve added a simple but detailed pattern onto the meghizium, and they’ve got the fairies’ blessing...” The rings glittered as light bounced off the metal, causing Camilo to narrow his eyes at the bright shimmer. “I can’t even begin to put a value on them. Needless to say, I won’t be surprised if they become priceless family heirlooms within the Eimoor family for all eternity.”

“They’re *that* precious?”

“Of course.”

He gazed at me wearily. I knew these items were much more expensive than most, but I didn't think they were on *that* level.

"Regarding payment for this project..." Camilo trailed off for a moment. "I'm sorry, but could I give it to you on another day? I've gotta request an increase in the amount. This is deserving of a much greater reward."

"Uh..." I tried to tell him that the payment we'd originally decided upon would be fine, but I quickly closed my mouth. I felt Diana exuding an aura that was similar to murderous intent. The two fairies also hid from her. "I-I'll leave it to you then." I felt cold sweat run down my back.

"But fairies, huh?" Camilo glanced at the duo. "You involved in something complicated again?"

The fairies both tried to make themselves look smaller, but they didn't hide as they'd done moments before. *Guess they're getting used to him.*

"It's a long story, so I'll just give you the short version, but it's not troublesome or anything. I just happened to get to know them, and it was all thanks to those rings," I explained, pointing.

He glanced back at the rings in his hand. "I see... So you're not involved in an absolutely horrible situation?"

"I promise you I'm not."

Camilo's shoulders slumped slightly, and he sighed. "And? You went out of your way to introduce them to me for a reason, right?"

"I don't have anything of immediate concern, but if something happens to them, I might need to come to you for help in procuring supplies. It'll make things quicker if you already know."

"Well, since you've shown me the real deal, I've no room for doubt."

He placed the ring down and folded his arms in front of him. For now, that was all. Neither Deepika nor Reeya had any need for him at this moment.

"That's all it is. Oh, and can you give these to the happy couple?" I took out the pair of blades. "This one's for Marius, and this one's for Julie."

Camilo shook his head. "Sorry, but I can't accept that request."

“Huh?”

I stared back at him blankly, but he grinned. He then removed a letter from his chest pocket and handed it to me.

“Looks like I surprised you back. Anyway, have a look.”

I took the letter from him. It was sealed using the Eimoors’ emblem, implying that this was directly from Marius. I used my own knife to open it up and read the neatly written words on the paper.

I’d like to invite Eizo and his family to my wedding. We shall prepare attire for them.

If I ignored his season’s greetings, this was basically the point of the letter. Shock and worry filled my mind. “I’m happy to receive this invitation...but will it be all right?” I was unable to mask my perplexed demeanor, and I didn’t know if Camilo was the right person to ask.

During the incident at the Eimoor household, I’d told the margrave that I was an aristocrat from the Nordic region, but I was certain that my true identity had long since been found out. A wedding was usually used to appeal to the high-ranking aristocrats, and I wasn’t sure if someone like me was allowed to attend.

Among us, only Diana and Anne held any aristocratic titles. Diana was Marius’s sister, so I wasn’t too worried about that, but Anne was an imperial princess. I didn’t want to attract any unnecessary attention.

“You should be fine. You’ll be dressed appropriately. And besides,” Camilo paused as he gave another grin, “you don’t really need a reason to call a friend to your wedding.”

“That so?” I muttered. It was all I could muster, and I ended up repeating myself. “That so...?” I tried my best to suppress something that was welling up from within me. “Got it. Then I’ll happily accept. Is that all right with all you guys?”

I smiled and looked at the rest of my family. They all seemed a little confused, but they managed to give me a nod.

“Great. Then I’ll be taking this,” I said, tucking the invitation into my pocket.

It felt like the letter was slightly warm to the touch.

“Ah, actually, there *is* something I want,” I said, suddenly remembering my request. I’d almost forgotten after receiving that invitation.

“And what’s that?” Camilo asked. “Is it difficult to obtain?”

“I don’t think it’ll be too troublesome for you. I wanted some pigments and oils to go with them. Oh, and a varnish that doesn’t have much color.”

“Pigment, oils, and colorless varnish? Ah, I see.” He caught on and nodded toward the pair of blades I’d brought. “And what colors did you want?”

“Any, really. I don’t know what pigments I’m going to need...but it would be troublesome if I didn’t have a certain hue to finish out a project. I want to gather a set of colors. Though, I don’t need all that much, and I don’t want my request to affect your business either.”

“Wait here. I think we have a few in stock.”

Camilo glanced toward the head clerk, who nodded and headed out.

“And I only want this if you can provide it,” I continued, “but I’m also looking for *urushi*, or lacquer.”

“*Urushi*?”

“It’s a type of varnish from the Nordic region. Usually, it comes in either black or vermilion. Whichever color is fine.” I didn’t think this description was totally accurate, but it was close enough.

“Nordic region. I see. I’ve got some connections with the soy sauce and *miso* merchants, so I can ask around.”

“Thanks. I wanted to use the *urushi* on some scabbards.”

“You want to use Nordic items for Nordic-style blades. I hear you.” He gave a firm nod, and I hoped I could get some *urushi* in the near future. “Is that all you need?”

“For now. I’ll let you know if I need anything else.”

“I’d like you to tell me about other things you might need.”

“Because you can make more money?”

Camilo grinned. “Right.”

We laughed together. The head clerk soon returned and nodded his head, signaling that he’d found some items. “I’ve already placed them in the cart, but is that all right with you?”

I nodded. “Yeah. Thank you.”

“And here’s the payment.”

“Thank you for this too.”

As usual, I received a leather bag. It felt a little lighter than usual. We were in the business of trade, and he’d subtracted the amount required to buy those pigments. I was grateful that he didn’t have any reservations and allowed me to pay as needed.

I turned to Camilo. “I guess the next time I’ll see you will be at the Eimoors’ residence.”

“Probably,” he replied.

I wondered if they were finished with the preparations for the wedding—judging by how relaxed Camilo seemed, I figured they were practically done. The ceremony was just around the corner, and they wouldn’t need to panic unless there was a last-second incident.

“Oh, and about these two,” I started.

“I know. You don’t have to tell me,” Camilo replied, putting a finger over his lips.

I’d brought the fairies here and introduced them all of my own accord; I couldn’t complain if he was willing to spread the news, but I knew he wasn’t the type. Camilo could keep a secret. *Besides, it’s not like anyone would believe him if he claimed that fairies came to his store one day.*

“And you two...” I said.

“Got it.” The fairies quickly concealed themselves once more.

Camilo and the head clerk seemed stunned. Though they knew what was going on, they still needed some time to process.

“Those abilities are splendid,” Camilo murmured. “I can’t tell where they are at all.”

Deepika giggled.

“Camilo, I’ll see you around.”

“Right.”

He and I exchanged a handshake, and we all left the room.

“Thank you, mister merchant,” Reeja called back.

Camilo once again looked surprised. Maybe he was trying to figure out how to explain this whole situation to Marius.

We walked to the back courtyard, and I spied the apprentice running around and playing with my two daughters. I stared for a while, taking in the heartwarming scene. Suddenly, the apprentice noticed me and hastily jogged over to my side.

“I’m sorry!” he cried. My daughters bounded over to us looking for head pats: Krul went to Anne and Lucy ran to Diana.

“Don’t worry about it,” I replied. “I’m always grateful when you play with them. Thank you.” I was more worried that Krul and Lucy had injured him in some way. I thought it was important for my daughters to interact with people of different ages (and, perhaps, sizes). After all, these fairies were small and looked like dolls, but I didn’t consider them children.

As always, I gave the apprentice a tip. When I reached out to tousle the boy’s hair, I realized that my hand on his head was higher than it used to be.

Everyone’s growing up.

I gazed at my hand for a moment, and with that wistful thought in mind, I led us to where our cart was parked in the warehouse. We hitched Krul to the front, and then everyone climbed aboard.

“Let’s head out!” Rike called.

Her announcement wasn’t directed at our family but at the invisible fairies. As the wagon slowly started to move, I could hear small gasps of adoration. The fairies didn’t seem at all panicked—in fact, they were awed by our bustling cart.

When I turned toward the pair, I saw Lucy standing there. *Maybe she's trying to protect these two should anything happen. Lucy was here first, so she's like their older sister.* Technically, the fairies weren't members of our household, but guests. Still, they ate with us alongside Lucy, and they slept inside the house. *Is it better to create an annex for guests? But that'd be way too much trouble...*

As I pondered, I gazed at the trio—they were still staring outside of the wagon. We rolled out of the city gates, and I bid the guard farewell. Once on the road, we were greeted with a view of clouds floating over the vast grassy plains.

“Wow!” the two fairies exclaimed. The family was used to this scene, but for Deepika and Reeja, the sight was fresh and new.

“You can show yourselves once we get a bit farther along,” I said.

“Okay!”

The rest of us, hearing this energetic response, started to smile.

“I’ve spotted several types of birds that you don’t often see in the forest,” Deepika said, making herself visible. She gazed toward a vicious bird of prey that was circling around in the sky. The raptor was slowly soaring among the clouds, turning its head to and fro. I guessed that it was looking for prey.

Someone had mentioned that there were owls within the Black Forest. “I’ve never seen them though,” I said.

“They usually sit motionless on the tree bark,” Samya explained. “Even I can barely see ’em.”

“That’s amazing.”

“They move around at night but don’t usually venture out of their homes until then.”

If even Samya—a tiger-type beastfolk sensitive to the presence of prey—couldn’t spot these birds, they must have truly impressive hiding skills. A majority of the creatures in the Black Forest (like foliage birds, tree deer, and green squirrels) had some sort of camouflage ability. Even boars could look like a brambly thicket at a glance. And apparently, owls were even better at

blending in with their surroundings than that. I likely wouldn't be able to spot one unless I was specifically looking for it.

Anne pointed to the raptor flying above us. "That bird circles the sky and searches for rabbits and smaller birds down below. When it locates prey, it'll swoop to the ground and capture them. I used to have a bird like that back home."

I guess the imperial family hunts with these birds. I assumed they weren't doing it for food like us, but for sport.

"Wow!" the fairies gushed, their voices full of astonishment.

Suddenly, the bird plunged to the ground at an intense speed.

"It's going so fast! Will it be okay?" Reeja asked worriedly. Even I thought the bird was quick.

Anne nodded. "It'll be fine, but that doesn't mean its hunt will be successful."

We all gulped and watched the bird from our wagon. It shot down into the tall grass of the plains, obscured from our view for a moment, and then flapped its wings once more and rose into the air. Clutched in its talons was either a mouse or a rabbit. It gripped its prey tightly.

"That was amazing!" Deepika shouted.

And with that, the cart continued to roll along.

We soon entered the forest, an area that both the fairies and I were accustomed to. In other words, none of the sights here were of much interest to them.

"It feels like we've returned home," Deepika said.

Lidy nodded. "Yes. We're more familiar with this place."

While Lidy hadn't grown up in this particular forest, she must've empathized—both fairies and elves mainly resided in forests. Lidy's home village no longer existed in the forest where she'd grown up. She'd come to live with me after the hobgoblin incident, and the rest of her village had packed up, leaving her old forest behind. Though it wasn't the place of her upbringing, I was genuinely

happy that Lidy thought the Black Forest felt familiar.

We arrived home, and the first thing we did was unload our cargo, taking things into the cabin. I wasn't going to ask the fairies to help us out, so I requested that they play with Krul and Lucy. It wasn't just because they were guests; the items we were unloading would be difficult for them to physically carry. It would've been convenient if they knew some spells to help lift items...but I didn't want them to go that far.

We finished unloading, and the next thing I wanted to do was prepare lunch.

"Does your head hurt? Or anywhere else?" I asked Reeja and Deepika. "Do you feel dizzy or feverish?"

"Nope."

"I'm fine too."

"And you don't feel tired compared to this morning?"

"The invisibility spell does burn through some magic, which draws on our stamina, but that's about it," Reeja remarked.

"Same here," said Deepika.

"Hm, all right. If you feel odd at all, please let me know."

The fairies nodded. I was trying to maintain a cautious mindset, but we wouldn't leave this forest for the rest of their stay—if they were fine for the next few days, I was planning on issuing them a clean bill of health. As such, they would essentially be discharged from my hospital.

But, before all of that, lunch. Just as I set out to prepare some food, I stopped in my tracks. "Shoot. Since we had the opportunity, we should've bought something in the city. The fairies could've tried outside food for a change," I mumbled.

This could've been a rare occasion for us to dine in the city, but I'd noticed the opportunity too late. Cooking wasn't smithing, but it still counted as creating something. Thus, my cheat abilities activated and my food tasted better than a normal chef's. Because I wasn't exactly playing fair, I didn't know if I could honestly be happy about that fact...but it was better than eating awful food and

taking psychological damage as a result.

“I wonder,” Anne murmured. She’d tagged along with me, aiming to get some water for herself and wash up. “Eizo, after having your cooking, I don’t know how they’d feel about eating normal food from the city.”

“Don’t you think it’d be a nice change of pace?”

“I do understand where you’re coming from, but it’s more about thought than taste. They want to eat your food because *you* made it.”

“Is that really how it is?”

“That’s how it is.”

Feeling a little shy, I rushed back into the kitchen and got to work.

“Um, on delivery days, we usually take free time for ourselves after lunch,” I said to the fairies as the meal was wrapping up, “so feel free to do as you like until dinner.”

Usually, Samya, Diana, Helen, and Anne would practice their archery or swordsmanship, Lidy would tend the garden, and Rike would be working in the forge with me. Recently, Samya had started to jump in and help with the farming. She claimed that it was fun to watch the crops grow.

Helen was a bit too strong for anyone else here, so Diana and Anne would often train together while the Lightning Strike looked after Krul and Lucy.

“If you become too tired, it might put strain on your bodies,” I cautioned. “It would be best if you didn’t push yourselves.”

But the two fairies nodded energetically. *Fair enough. They don’t seem ill at all, and they’re in a different environment.* I understood their urge to explore.

“Well, all right. You can do as you like, but make sure to stay close to someone in case something happens.”

“Okay!”

The two fairies seemed awfully enthusiastic, and I let out a sigh.

“All right. Free time until dinner.”

At my words, the family split off, each doing their own thing. *Guess I'll do what I want too.* I entered the forge alongside Rike, who seemed to have some project of her own to work on.

I first placed the pair of blades onto the *kamidana*, clapped my hands, and said a small prayer. I then took down Julie's knife. Since I was planning to work with them, it wasn't really necessary for me to put the blades on the *kamidana* and pray. However, they'd gone on a journey and returned home, so I felt it best to welcome them back.

"Guess I'll touch up your makeup."

I unsheathed Julie's knife, removed the rivets that attached the wooden hilt, and then set the naked metal blade aside. Then, I turned my focus to the scabbard and the hilt. I'd already brought in the varnish that Camilo had sold me, and I popped open the lid, preparing to use it on the wood. The pot that held the varnish seemed to have a layer of glaze over its surface. *Maybe this is from the Nordic region.* I dipped my brush into the varnish, drew it against the lip of the pot to remove the excess, and then painted the scabbard. Since the varnish was wet, I could see the brushstrokes on the grain, but they would fade once absorbed into the wood.

I wasn't sure how this particular varnish was made, but it hardly changed the colors on my scabbard—the rose remained vibrant and bright. I was more worried about the colors bleeding once the varnish seeped in. Though I did my best to prevent any mistakes, I was prepared to remake the scabbard if needed. Luckily, I had two weeks to spare.

Once the scabbard and the hilt had been coated, I stuck a piece of wood inside the scabbard and clamped everything in a vise to dry.

Now, all I had to do was wait. The forge was dry and hot, but that didn't make this process instantaneous; at the earliest, it'd still take around thirty minutes. I glanced around the workshop, thinking of what I should do with this time, and my eyes landed on a sheet of metal.

I have an idea. This might be good.

While Rike was making an elite model knife, I took my chance and heated the sheet metal. Once it was red-hot, I used my chisel to separate it into three

smaller sheets. I then heated one of the sheets again and started to hammer it. Since the piece of metal wasn't very large, I didn't use my normal hammer, but a much smaller one suited for detail work. It was a tiny but sturdy tool—more than enough for this particular project. Instead of the usual loud clangs, a sharper tone echoed throughout the room.

I repeated the process of heating and hammering the plate until I'd shaped it into a tiny knife. Because it was much smaller than my usual work, my eyes had to strain a bit. Had I still possessed the body of a forty-year-old, this would've been tough for me.

This blade would end up slightly better than an elite model, but not quite as dangerous as a custom one—after all, the receivers of these gifts weren't part of my family.

Once I finished making one tiny blade, I checked on Julie's scabbard. The varnish had dried, and the color of the rose hadn't bled. I breathed a sigh of relief. I didn't want to apply a thick coat of varnish, so I decided to brush on a second layer and be done with it. Swiftly, I reapplied varnish and waited for the pieces to dry once more. If needed, I could polish them a little, but that was the only step left—this knife would be completely finished by tomorrow.

While waiting for the second layer to dry, I hammered the other two small sheets in a similar fashion. I wondered whether this project would gain me any experience or enhance my cheat abilities. *They're a bit smaller than the norm, but I'm going through the exact same process as usual.* Since these blades were tiny, I heated, quenched, and tempered all three at once. Once sharpened, they would be fully functional. Because of the size, I couldn't be as detailed, but I still added my usual cat pommel relief. Also, deerskin would be too large for these hilts, so wrapped string around them as a substitute for a leather grip.

I couldn't make wooden scabbards, so I created simple sheaths by gluing strips of leather together and sewing the sides with string. They certainly weren't luxurious, but they were practical.

"This should be good enough."

Atop my bench were three doll-sized knives. A certain horror movie about a knife-wielding doll possessed by the spirit of a murderer flashed across my

mind...but I didn't think that the fairies would do such a thing. *I'll just be careful so it doesn't happen to me.*

"Wow, those look so cute," Rike said. Her eyes sparkled as she gazed at the knives.

I wondered if she'd played with dolls as a child. *I just assumed that dwarves used metal and hammers as their toys, but that's not a good stereotype to have.*

"I thought it might be good to make small items like these. It was a chance to practice detailed work."

"I see..." She placed her hand over her chin.

Rike, I was half-joking...

"I'm not totally serious, you know," I said quickly.

She silently nodded. With the varnish drying and the tiny knives complete, I left the workshop to prepare some dinner.

After our evening meal, we'd normally discuss tomorrow's plans, but tonight I took out the three small knives and placed them on the table.

"Reeja, Deepika."

"Yes?" they asked, looking at me.

"Here's a little gift, from me to you. Three knives."

The fairies' eyes glimmered. "Can we really have these?!"

"Of course. Our meeting must be some kind of fate, don't you think? There's one for both of you, and a third for Gizelle."

I didn't want to leave the one other fairy I knew (who happened to be the chief) out of this and get cursed or something. So, I'd prepared a knife for her as well.

"Can I touch them?" Deepika asked cautiously.

I nodded. "Of course."

She slowly removed the knife from the scabbard. "Wow!" Her eyes sparkled

with delight.

Knives *could* be used as weapons, but they were, first and foremost, tools. Either way, I'd poured my heart into making these, so I was glad to see the fairies look so happy.

Reeja followed suit and slowly removed her knife. Her beaming expression was similar to Deepika's. She gazed intently at the blade.

"I'm happy to see you guys looking so excited."

The two nodded their heads rapidly.

"Though, I hope I won't cause a stir with the fairy blacksmith." That was my only concern, but perhaps I was voicing it too late. I didn't want their craftsman to get angry at me and say, "But they have *me*!"

"Ah, that one's lazy, so I think it'll be fine."

"Yeah, I feel like they'll be more relieved. I can imagine them saying, 'Whew! Less work for me!' or something along those lines."

"Really?" I asked.

"Yeah."

I thought back to my life before I'd been reincarnated. Yeah, I'd been a bit of a workaholic on Earth...but it seemed rare for a craftsman to have a lazy, blasé attitude. *No, wait...*

"You guys don't use tools often, do you?" I asked.

Deepika shook her head. "No, not often."

That seemed only natural. If I were to look at it from an extremist's point of view, tools were used to attain food for survival—fairies required practically no food. If they could be nourished by absorbing magic in the forest, that was all they needed. No tools required.

However, tools were used for other things such as self-defense. After nourishment, that would be the bare minimum required for survival. I guessed that knives were especially favored during these situations, and though they wouldn't break easily, I could understand why it might be a pain to constantly

make them. In a sense, making less felt like a destination I should aim for. *That might make the fairy blacksmith my master.*

“I’m glad I could be of use to your craftsman,” I said with a grin.

Deepika and Reeja smiled back.

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The next day, our usual routine picked back up. The fairies would only be staying with us for a little while longer, and they continued watching us complete our daily tasks. We forged the items needed to fulfill our next order, tended the garden, and played with Krul and Lucy.

The scabbard and hilt of Julie’s blade had been beautifully coated with varnish—I reassembled the knife and scabbard, stored her blade in a bag alongside Marius’s, and placed that bag on the *kamidana*.

The days passed quickly, and before long, it was time to part ways with the fairies.

“It seems like both of you are healthy, so you’re free to go back home. If anything else happens, please feel free to drop by. But...” I trailed off. As they hovered in front of me, I touched a fingertip to each of their foreheads, trying to gauge their temperatures.

“We know,” Deepika replied. “You won’t be here on the day of the wedding, right? And you’ll need to go to the city every now and then to fulfill orders.”

“Correct. I’m sorry for the inconvenience.” I bowed my head apologetically.

Reeja shook her head. “Not at all. You saved my life. You’re a friendly neighbor to the fairies.”

“In fact, you saved a life that we believed was lost,” Deepika said. “We cannot express our gratitude enough.”

“I’m glad you feel that way.”

We all lined up in front of the cabin, and the fairies said their farewells.

“Thank you all again.”

“Quite honestly, I had a lot of fun! I’d love to drop by another time.”

“If you’d like to show up again just to play—preferably while in good health—we’d welcome you anytime.” I turned to my family. “Right, guys?”

They all smiled and nodded. My daughters both cried out happily.

“Kulululu!”

“Arf! Arf!”

The fairies beamed. “That makes us so happy. If we get another opportunity, we shall drop by again.”

“Of course. We’ll be waiting.”

The fairies repeatedly turned around and waved their hands as they slowly disappeared into the dense forest foliage. We all waved back until they were out of sight.

After they left, I turned to my family to discuss future plans.

“Our next delivery should be the day before the wedding. We can ask Camilo about the timing for the ceremony and figure out when to arrive at the capital.”

Diana nodded. “That sounds like a plan.”

“I want to confirm something with you and Anne. In terms of aristocratic etiquette, when should we arrive at the wedding itself? And how long should we stay?”

I had more (installed) knowledge than most, and I knew just enough etiquette to keep from coming off as rude. But the Watchdog, perhaps not expecting me to attend an aristocratic wedding, hadn’t provided me with any information regarding one.

“Oh, are you unaware?” Anne asked teasingly.

I frowned. “I left the Nordic region before anyone around me could begin to talk about stuff like that. I know the bare minimum in terms of manners, but the customs I know are from the Nordic region. It would be unfortunate if there were any cultural differences.”

“Fair enough,” Anne said with a nod. “However, the etiquette I’m familiar

with comes from the empire. And I hope this doesn't sound snooty, but I only know manners for when a *princess* is called upon. Is that fine with you?"

Since Anne was the seventh imperial princess, if she was invited to a party, it was most certainly an extremely extravagant one. At most events, she was probably the highest-ranking person in attendance. Because of this, she probably wasn't a perfect resource for our exact situation, but I figured it wouldn't hurt to learn. *I might need this info in the future.*

"Of course it's fine," I replied. "If I learn from you, I won't have to wonder about how to act around other high-ranking aristocrats."

"I see. But there really isn't much to be worried about. You can't arrive too early, but you can't get there too late either; you don't want everyone to wait for you. Even a member of the imperial family can't keep others waiting for too long."

"That makes sense."

Perhaps some of Anne's siblings had tried that—kept people waiting because they were of the imperial family. However, she didn't seem to agree with that stance. It might've been rude to assume, but no one should want to earn the ire of the host and their guests over such a trivial thing, not even members of the imperial family. After all, revolutions were fueled by small slights and concerns simmering over time until they exploded.

"In my experience, it's best to arrive around the time the sun reaches its apex," Anne explained. "Once there, all that's left to do is to sit in the seats for honored guests and smile when greeting others."

"That part sounds troublesome," I murmured.

"A little, I guess." Anne, perhaps remembering those days, crinkled her nose. It was easy to assume that royalty and high-ranking officials had it easy, but they certainly had their fair share of worries.

"I can't be careless around the smiling people who come later," I noted.

"Right. But I'm guessing that the person occupying the guest seat of highest honor will be Margrave Menzel...assuming that no one from the royal family makes an appearance."

“Ah...”

The margrave was of high rank *and* involved with both the bride and the groom. *He’s a minister, isn’t he?* The kingdom mostly ran on a council system, and as a person not related to the royal family, the margrave had likely attained the highest rank possible. It wasn’t odd for him to be invited as the guest of honor, and this was the best opportunity to display how closely connected he was to Count Eimoor.

I turned to Diana. “Any insight from the kingdom?”

“Remember when you went to the ceremony celebrating my brother’s succession? It’ll be similar to that. Guests normally arrive after noon.”

“Ah, that party.” I remembered it being a very straightforward gathering of people. The wedding, like the succession party, was to notify others of a life event—it was only natural that they would be similar.

“We’ll gather around for a meal, there’ll be a small ball, and you’ll have a chance to greet the bride and groom,” explained Diana.

“That really is like last time.”

“Yep. Since my brother’s a count, he has to make the party seem a bit grand, but everyone knows that the Eimoors are a military family. There’s no need for you to be so nervous.”

“Just need to be a bit less stiff, I suppose.”

“I think so. Anne and I will be there to support you too. You’ll be fine, Eizo.”

Diana glanced at the other four non-aristocrats, all of whom lacked experience at this sort of thing. However, the host and the guest of honor knew about us, so I felt like they’d turn a blind eye to any accidental social faux pas we might commit.

“I don’t mind waiting here at the cabin,” Samya said nervously. I understood her anxiety.

“Since the entire family’s being invited, I don’t think that’s a good idea,” I replied. Samya tried to respond, but I waved my hand to stop her. “You might be thinking that if you do anything rude, it’ll affect me, but I know that the host

won't get angry and make a fuss about it. This is a rare occasion. Why don't we try to enjoy it?"

"The host is my older brother," Diana added. "We'll be fine."

I agreed. Samya, Rike, Lidy, and Helen all looked at each other before nodding.

"All right then. I'll tell Camilo that we'll arrive at the wedding venue a bit past noon."

Everyone voiced their assent. *I wonder what'll happen.* Excited, but with a touch of anxiety, I told everyone that we'd complete our usual work today.

Chapter 13: Wedding Ceremony

After the meeting, we returned to our daily routine. Still, none of us could help our feelings of restlessness. I honestly felt overjoyed that I'd get to be involved in such a momentous occasion. I wasn't sure if my excited energy was transferred into my hammer, but I felt my work going a lot faster than usual.

"By the way, will the ceremony food be delicious?" Samya asked one day during dinner.

She'd never attended a human wedding before, though she might've been dragged to a beastfolk wedding by her parents. The same applied to everyone here other than Diana and Anne. There weren't many aristocrats who'd call a mercenary like Helen to their wedding, and while I might've had some experience in my previous world, I'd never attended a wedding here. Hence why I'd consulted Diana and Anne about etiquette.

"The wedding's generally for close friends and relatives, but this one's being hosted by an aristocrat," Diana answered. "No one wants to seem stingy, or they might be underestimated in the future, which would pose an even greater problem. Therefore, the event will probably have decent food."

Anne nodded in agreement. An aristocratic party was not only a display of one's wealth but of connections too. If the host held back, people could infer that they didn't possess adequate money or power, resulting in a swarm of unreasonable requests.

"Is it like the food we had at the capital last time?" Samya asked.

I assumed she was talking about Pops's place. She'd taken a liking to his restaurant, The Gold-Tusked Boar, and while I wasn't sure if she knew any others, I was also fond of his food. Honestly, I wouldn't have minded becoming a regular.

"I wonder," Diana said thoughtfully. "The chef for the Eimoor estate isn't bad or anything, but it might not be as good as that place."

“They might call Pops in to cook,” I suggested.

“Oh!” Diana gave a firm nod. “Yes, that’s a possibility,”

“Frankly, I’m not even considering Marius’s wishes,” I said teasingly. “I feel like Pops would yell, ‘You’re not calling *us*?! What’re you being so reserved for?!’ or something.”

“That’s true.”

Everyone else nodded along. Anne had visited Pops’s restaurant on a separate occasion, so she was well aware of the staff there.

I turned back to Samya. “Well, I’m not sure if Pops will be the cook, but I doubt you’ll be fed anything weird. I think you can have high hopes about the food.”

“Got it.”

Wedding food, huh? I’d heard that brides and grooms often fought over what to serve at the reception. Fortunately or unfortunately, I’d never experienced such an occasion. When we’d attended the party for Marius’s succession, the servants of the Eimoor household had made all the food. I didn’t expect the tables to be filled with special dishes that would symbolize good fortune (like in my previous world), but the wedding menu would certainly be different from the succession one. *If they’re not too difficult to make, I’d love to prepare special foods for our own celebratory occasions...but I guess I’ll have to see about that.*

###

Soon enough, the day to deliver our wares arrived. We were all getting antsy, but our usual smithing routine and the trip to Camilo’s didn’t change. The only difference today was that I told Camilo my plans, and he replied, “I think I’ll be there by then.”

The reception was tomorrow; if everyone was panicking now, they wouldn’t make it in time. Our exchange with Camilo was brief and casual. I patted the apprentice’s head as usual and gave him a small tip before we headed home.

In a blink of an eye, the day of the reception was upon us.

“Clothes aside, we should at least be clean,” I remarked.

Krul and Lucy were cleaning their bodies in the lake while I fetched some water—I decided to bathe as well. Though I was a simple blacksmith from the countryside, I didn’t want to embarrass my friend. Being sanitary was important.

By the time I arrived home, everyone was carefully making their preparations.

Rike was combing Diana’s hair more meticulously than usual. After all, this was her *brother’s* wedding, and she wanted to look her best.

“Diana, you could’ve gone on ahead,” I said. “You didn’t want to arrive a little early?”

“Oh? Am I to infer that you’re leaving me out of the group?” Diana asked.

Taken aback, I said, “No, that’s not what I—”

“I know.” Diana interrupted with an unladylike smirk. “Thank you, Eizo. My brother is important to me, but I’m currently a member of *this* household.”

“I see.” I didn’t say anything further to her—there was no need. Instead, I turned to the rest of the group. “All right. Once we’re dressed up, I guess we can slowly and idly make our way to the venue.”

Everyone replied with an enthusiastic, “Okay!”

The cart leisurely traveled through the forest. I wasn’t sure if Krul had caught our excitement, but it felt like her steps were lighter than usual.

“We’ll bring some food back for you, Krul,” I assured her.

“*Kulululu*,” she replied happily.

I wondered if decent fodder existed in this world. If my Krul had been a horse, I might’ve opted for that.

“I’m sure she’ll get some food. Lucy too. They’ll be fine,” Diana replied wearily.

During the party, it was the host’s responsibility to take care of their guests’ horses or other creatures. Lucy wagged her tail and barked. *She’s gotten bigger*

too. I was more of a cat person, and I knew how quickly cats matured on Earth...but I didn't have a single clue when it came to wolves.

I remembered seeing a TV show about a Siberian husky puppy—drawing information from that, Lucy seemed a lot larger than her actual age would suggest.

"I wonder how big she'll become," I murmured when Lucy came to me. She'd been making her rounds on everyone's laps. I petted her head, causing her tail to wag even faster.

Samya gazed at her. "She's the largest wolf pup I've ever seen."

If Samya—who'd seen many wolves in her life—said so, it only solidified that the magical beast attributes within Lucy were making her grow. I wondered if Lucy would become as large as the wolf goddess from that popular animated movie. *I'd just need to build a larger doghouse for her.*

"I do think that magic is causing her to get bigger," Lidy said. "I believe she'll grow to become a bit taller than Anne."

So...a little over two meters tall. That would make her about four to five meters in length. She'd easily be able to pull the cart like Krul, and there was a good chance that she'd want to. I was glad that she wouldn't become too abnormally large, but even so, a four-meter-long wolf would be a bit too eye-catching during hunting, and I felt like the citizens of the city might start to fear her.

"In other words, she won't become any larger than that," Lidy concluded. "Krul doesn't seem to be growing at an abnormal rate, but as you know, this *is* the Black Forest."

"I hear you."

Since Lucy had become a magical beast, part of her body was made of magical energy. Had we lived in a forest with normal levels of magic, we would've been able to predict Lucy and Krul's maturity to some extent, but our house was in the *Black Forest*—one of the few regions in the world that was densest with magical energy. None of us had a clue about how that would affect Lucy.

"Whatever the case, I decided to raise her. I'll continue to do so until the

end,” I said, rubbing Lucy’s head.

I wasn’t sure if she knew what I was talking about, but she rubbed her head against me and gave a loud, “Arf!”

The cart passed through the forest and rolled onto the main road, which linked both the city and the capital. We usually turned toward the city, but the capital was actually in the opposite direction, so we turned that way instead. In the past, Krul had seemed confused about the change in route, but today, she obediently strolled where we led her.

“Since we went into the city yesterday, does she know that we’ve got different business today?” I wondered.

“Krul’s smart. I wouldn’t be surprised if she’s figured it out,” Rike, our driver, replied.

Alongside the road, the usual carpet of greenery spread out across vast fields, absorbing the blessings of the sun and rustling in the ticklish breeze. Overall, the path seemed as peaceful as usual. After traveling for a short time, we saw an odd group marching in front of us, all clad in armor. We didn’t immediately become vigilant at the sight of them, but I noticed Helen place her hand on her blade, which she’d stored on the floor of the cart. *Just in case.*

“Why, hello there!” I called out. “Pardon me from above!”

I took a closer look at the group’s armor and spied the Eimoor crest engraved on their breastplates. These soldiers were sentries in the city—I even recognized some familiar faces I’d met at the front gate. Since the lord of the city was getting married, they were apparently standing guard along the road so that none of the wedding guests would get assaulted while traveling.

One of the guards I knew loudly called out to us. “I was wondering whose wagon that was, but I guess it’s you guys. Headed to the capital today?”

“Yeah. I’ve got some business there.”

“We just came back from patrolling that area, so I think you’ll be fine—be careful anyway.”

“We will. Thank you!”

Lucy barked from the carriage, and the guards all waved back. We soon passed them and continued toward our destination. Thanks to their patrols, the rest of the trip went smoothly, and we arrived at the gates to the capital without incident.

As usual, the place was bustling. I was worried that we'd arrived a bit too early, but as we queued for inspections, I realized that the timing had been perfect. Amidst the buzzing crowd, a small line had started to form. Krul would give an occasional bored yawn, while Lucy frantically looked around at the unusual faces. She kept wagging her tail as if to ask, "What's that?" When I glanced at Lucy, I noticed a lizardman making eye contact with her and offering a smile. He (or she—I couldn't tell the difference) seemed to also view Lucy as a small, adorable puppy.

While Lucy was soothing the air around her, the line had grown longer. At this point, I realized that our timing might not have been perfect after all. *We might actually arrive a bit later than expected.* However, when we were about halfway to the gates, someone rushed over to us.

"Arf! Arf!"

Lucy quickly noticed the approaching figure and started barking. I gave a nod of recognition.

"Catalina."

She elegantly leaped onto our cart, displaying her physical capabilities, which were equal to Helen's. Seeing her agility sparked even more questions about Catalina's origin. *But from other people's point of view, I'm a mysterious blacksmith who also prompts questions, so it'd be unfair to pry...*

"I'm so sorry to keep you waiting," Catalina said. "Rike, I shall take over being the driver."

We adjusted our seats, and Catalina took the reins. "Krul, please be nice to me." She directed the cart away from the line—Krul gave a small cry of acknowledgment and started to walk.

Catalina then turned around in the driver's seat. "Do you not have the invitation on you?"

“Got it right here,” I replied, patting my chest pocket. I’d kept it on me, tucked safely away in case of any trouble.

“If you’d shown that, you would’ve gotten prioritized and passed through faster.”

“Really? But...”

This was a joyous occasion, and as the guest of a count, I may have had that privilege...but I was just a simple blacksmith. I hesitated to use that advantage over others. Diana and Anne didn’t say anything.

When I asked the duo later, Anne said, “I was usually the guest of honor at events. There aren’t any retainers who don’t know the princess.” She’d never needed an invitation to be immediately prioritized—her face alone was enough.

Diana just shrugged. “I was always associated with the inner workings of the capital, so I never used the public gates when I lived here.”

I guess that’s fair.

“I thought that might be the case, so I’ve come to welcome you all,” Catalina said. “We’ll head into the manor now.”

We were able to skip the line, and as we approached the aforementioned gates, Catalina fished out a wooden plate and showed it to the guard. The guard nodded and stepped out of the way—our possessions weren’t even inspected. Had we brought any prohibited items, it could’ve been disastrous, but I’m sure Marius would’ve covered for us.

We rolled through the gate and onto the main street, which was filled with crowds of people. As always, the capital was home to a diverse population—people of different ages, genders, and species all mingled here living their lives.

“I kinda like this atmosphere,” I remarked. In Japan, I’d lived in a convenient area, with my workplace right at the center of the city. As such, I was familiar with busy environments like this.

“Would you like to immigrate here?” Catalina asked with a chuckle. “I’m sure my master would be ecstatic.”

I gave a dry laugh. “Nah. I don’t dislike the capital, but I’m more suited to the

forest.”

“I can see that.” She glanced at Diana. “It’s obvious when I observe my lady and the rest of your household.” She sounded a bit envious, but that tone quickly dissipated when Lucy jumped onto her lap. “Ah, Lucy! You’re so cute.”

“She’s *our* child,” Diana said firmly.

“Oh, I know,” Catalina replied, absolutely smitten with our wolf pup.

It wasn’t hard to imagine Catalina trying to make Lucy *her* child after the party. Had Lucy been a normal baby wolf who’d lost her parents, I might’ve given that a smidge of consideration. But Lucy was a magical beast—there was no way she could live with Catalina.

Maybe if we find a regular wolf pup in the forest... Nope, can’t do it. I can only imagine that wolf becoming our child too. In exchange for not being able to adopt Lucy, Catalina wanted to hear about her, so Diana and Samya told stories about Lucy joining their hunts in the forest. Catalina’s expressiveness seemed to delight Lucy, and before we knew it, we arrived at the Eimoor estate, which we now knew rather well.

A man soon came to us, seeking to store our horse-drawn cart—or in our case, drake-drawn cart—in the back.

“Ah, Matthias! It’s you,” I said, hopping off the back of the cart with presents in hand.

“Oh, hey,” he replied.

“Have you been doing well?” I asked.

“Of course. My, a drake... How unusual.”

“I guess so.”

Matthias had been in charge of the horses during the monster subjugation campaign. He was casual with me because we knew each other (and because I was just a normal blacksmith), but if he’d been faced with some unknown aristocrat, he probably would’ve been more formal. Around us, he kept his greetings frank and friendly. He was pretty laid-back, as always, and I felt a twinge of nostalgia.

"I'll leave my daughters to you," I said.

"Uh... Of course." Matthias seemed a bit skeptical at first, but he soon pounded his chest with pride.

I'm sure they'll be fine with him.

"Be good, you two."

"Kulululu."

"Arf!"

I patted their heads, and the rest of my family followed suit. It felt lonely to part ways with them, even for a short while. Krul obediently pulled the cart for Matthias, and Lucy quietly followed behind.

After we sent them off, Catalina said, "This way, please."

We nodded and followed behind her. When we entered the estate, I spied a familiar servant standing nearby.

"We have prepared wedding attire for all of you," the servant said. "The ladies may follow Catalina. Sir Eizo, if you'll please come with me."

"Ah, Bowman," I said. "Sorry to always trouble you."

"Not to worry—no trouble at all."

This friendly and well-built servant was named Bowman. I'd heard that he was pretty highly ranked among the staff of the Eimoor estate. Momentarily, I wondered whether someone so important should be concerning themselves with me—it seemed a bit excessive, but this was Marius's way of being thoughtful, and it *was* a celebratory moment. So, I obediently followed behind. *I wonder how I'll be dressed up today.* Bowman and I walked down the corridor as we'd done in the past, and he finally opened a door.

"Over here, please," he said.

"Thank you."

A gave a slight bow and entered the room, only to, predictably, be greeted by several other servants. I didn't know how to wear fancy clothes, after all.

"I'm really sorry to trouble you all every time."

“Please don’t fret about it.”

I placed my presents on a small table, and the servants got to work dressing me up. If I resisted, it’d only take more time, so I obediently stayed still. While I was being fitted with new clothes, I pondered buying my own set of nice clothes, something that would be fancy enough for these types of occasions.

But I don’t know how often I’ll use them. I was just a simple blacksmith, and if the margrave caught wind of my intentions... *“I heard you’ve resolved to live an upscale life, so I bequeath you the title of baron!”* I could imagine him saying that enthusiastically, like he was sharing a sack of potatoes freshly plucked from his garden.

I felt apologetic for causing trouble every time I was at the Eimoor estate, but these occasions were rare—I hoped the servants would forgive me. Since a few people were helping me get dressed, it was all over quickly. I now wore apparel fitting for an aristocrat of the kingdom—nothing at all from the Nordic region.

Regardless of whether these clothes suited me or not, it would’ve been troubling if they’d tried to dress me in traditional Japanese garb like *haori* and *hakama*. The ceremonial garment I currently wore was splendid, with various bits of embroidery everywhere, but it didn’t look too extravagant. After all, the Eimoors were a military family and less concerned about appearances than other aristocrats.

These clothes were probably left behind by a man in the family—not Marius, though. I internally expressed my gratitude to that person, whoever they were, for graciously allowing me to borrow them.

Once dressed, I grabbed my present and followed Bowman. I was then guided into a room with chairs and no table. This looked to be the waiting room for guests. Voices came from the room next door.

“Did you prepare this space just for us?” I asked.

“We certainly did,” Bowman replied. “You and your family don’t do well around aristocrats, do you?”

“I’m deeply sorry to trouble you once more.” I bowed my head.

Bowman smiled and nonchalantly replied, “We’re simply offering hospitality

to our guests.”

I didn’t want people to pry about my background, and the same went for Anne. Thus, I was truly glad for this arrangement, and I couldn’t thank the people of this house enough. *Maybe I’ll bring a present for the staff here.* There were probably numerous other servants helping my family get ready—after all, before an event, women needed time to get dressed properly and complete other preparations. This was similar to my previous world. *Not to mention, we’re going to a luxurious banquet. Of course it’s going to take a little extra time for the ladies to get ready.*

I used this opportunity to engage in some small talk with Bowman, and eventually, we heard a knock at the door. I guessed the women had arrived, so I nodded.

Bowman called out, “Please come in. Sir Eizo is here.”

The door opened with a clack, and the rest of my family entered, each wearing a different colored dress. Samya wore orange; Rike had yellow. Diana had donned an apt shade of indigo. Lidy was in green, Helen was dressed in red, and finally, Anne wore purple. They were all dressed uniquely, which wasn’t too out of the ordinary on Earth, but I knew that it took painstaking effort to gather a myriad of colors in this world.

I had no idea where the staff had borrowed (or bought) these dresses, but my family members seemed to fit into them quite well. Since measurements hadn’t been made beforehand, not everyone was a perfect fit. Helen and Anne were too tall for their dresses, so a lace hem had been added—Rike’s sleeves had been brought in a bit at her shoulders. These alterations were most likely improvised, just enough to last the day. Even so, it was difficult to tell that the dresses were altered unless you scrutinized them closely. The women had seemed to take quite a while getting ready, and now I knew why.

It went without saying that Diana was in her own dress—it fit her perfectly. *That’s a relief.* If her clothes didn’t fit because her stomach now protruded or her shoulders had become too muscular and broad, this celebratory day would’ve been overshadowed by my apologies. I wished to avoid that outcome.

Regardless, everyone was now dressed suitably for the occasion, even

wearing some makeup. With each person in their own uniquely colored dress, they looked like a field of flowers in full bloom.

“You guys look great,” I said, unable to suppress my awe.

Samya hit my shoulder. The dress was tailored so that her tail was out, and it was less revealing than her normal clothes.

“You look like Leopold’s mother,” Anne said to her.

His mom’s a lion beastfolk, I think. Samya was a tiger-type, but she must’ve emanated a noble, princess-like aura. Unfortunately, I didn’t have any other princess friends, so I couldn’t confirm that...but it was true that Samya looked great in her dress.

Rike stood tall without looking embarrassed. Her hair, which she’d once said was stiff and rough, flowed behind her and was fastened with a golden hairpin. Her usual jovial nature was gone—she looked like an older sister. Though her appearance and stature made her look like a dressed-up child, she exuded an air of maturity.

“I’m not used to clothes like this,” Rike murmured.

“So you’ve said,” Diana replied with a strained smile. “You kept mumbling ‘My clothes can be more plain,’ the whole time we were getting ready.”

I understood Rike’s feelings all too well—I’d also offered some resistance at first.

“You look great,” I assured her. “Just stand there proudly.”

“You got it, Boss!” She gave me a broad smile and seemed to relax back into her normal demeanor. Compared to her subdued expression from moments before, it was like night and day.

Diana, perhaps used to the attire, didn’t seem as awkward as everyone else (excluding Anne, of course).

“When you lived here, did you have to wear clothes like this every day?” I asked her.

“Of course not,” Diana replied, sounding exhausted. “I usually wore something similar to what I wear at the cabin.”

Her gown wasn't flashy or gaudy, but it was decorated with quite a bit of embroidery, so it was easy to see the work that'd gone into making it. Her long hair, usually flowing free, was tied up neatly. She didn't look like a goddess or anything, but she was the spitting image of what I thought an aristocratic woman would look like.

"You wear your clothes so naturally—they suit you so well," I said.

Samya folded her arms in front of her and nodded in agreement. *You shouldn't act so casually. Oh, and Samya, a part of your dress is folding up.*

It was Diana's turn to hit my shoulder. She then smiled and said, "Thank you."

That flustered me a bit. "S-Sure. You're welcome."

Lidy hadn't changed her hairstyle, and she was wearing just the faintest layer of makeup. *I mean, she is an elf.* Her dress wasn't as intricate as the others, but that simplicity accentuated her proportions and face.

"You look like a fairy from the forest," I remarked.

I'd seen actual fairies like Gizelle, but if I were asked to paint a picture of a fairy in a forest, I'd probably ask Lidy to be my model. I felt an impact on my shoulder for the umpteenth time, but it didn't hurt as much as Samya or Diana's hits.

Anne nodded at my words. "She looks like she came straight out of a fairy tale."

"Yeah. I'm not even trying to be flattering—it's what I genuinely believe."

I'd seen other elves during long trips, and I always thought that their kind was blessed with great beauty. Lidy polished that image even more with this attire.

Helen was even quieter than Lidy. Her face was as red as her dress, and she visibly trembled—the intense visage of the Lightning Strike was nowhere to be seen. Her dress was very flashy, perhaps second only to Anne's. Fabric had been added to the hem, making her dress seem longer, and it was exquisitely decorated. The look complemented her tall physique, and if I'd been told that she was an aristocratic lady, I wouldn't have thought twice about it. *Well, that's only half true.* The scars on her face were slightly out of place, but that was very

trivial to me.

“You’re a natural beauty anyway, Helen,” I muttered.

Suddenly, Helen’s right arm disappeared from my sight. Feeling a chill run down my spine, I reacted in a flash and crouched. With a loud *whoosh*, Helen’s arm swung through where my shoulder had been a second before. *I don’t want to receive her full-force attack! It might dislocate my shoulder.*

“Now, now. Eizo’s just complimenting you, and the dress really does look great,” Diana soothed, gently patting Helen’s shoulder.

Helen gave a small nod and stared at me. I tipped my head in agreement. Her face was still red, but her trembling had stopped.

“And as for you, Anne...” I looked her over. “I mean, you’re a princess.”

“Hey!” Anne replied with a pout.

The servants, mindful of Anne’s rank, had given her the most lavishly decorated dress. If one were to imagine a princess’s gown, something like her dress would probably come to mind. Unlike Diana, Anne didn’t have a dress here that was tailor-made for her, but she wore it so well anyway. She was probably used to wearing attire like this.

“Like the others, you really do look good. I expected no less from you.”

“That still sounds kind of weird to me...but thank you,” Anne said. She gave me a genuine smile—it was a real one, so unlike the fake one she used as the seventh imperial princess.

Bowman, who’d been watching over the whole scene, smiled at us. “Now, is everyone ready?”

I nodded. “Yes. Sorry to keep you waiting.”

“Oh, not at all. Right this way, please.”

He guided us outside of the room and we followed him through the manor. Along the way, I noticed a tapestry I hadn’t seen before. *Are the hallways decorated for this occasion?* Since that intricate piece probably required constant cleaning, I imagined that it was generally stored away.

Bowman seemed to notice me gazing around. “Our manor has quite the history, so we’re putting that on display.”

I remembered that much of the art displayed at the Eimoor estate depicted scenes of battle. The household *was* known for its military prowess, so it wasn’t just for show. Several similar figures engaged in combat were illustrated on these tapestries—I guessed that they were the historical masters of the Eimoor household. Monsters and humans alike fought on the enemy side.

Samya, Rike, and Lidy seemed interested as they glanced at the tapestries decorating the corridors. Diana didn’t seem to care at all. *Well, it’s her own house. I wouldn’t be surprised if she explored this manor as a child and stumbled upon these tapestries multiple times.* Helen and Anne, on the other hand, seemed spellbound. The former was probably interested in the battle scenes, and the latter was viewing the history of another kingdom’s aristocratic lineage.

If no huge battle occurred during Marius’s reign, I wondered if the monster subjugation campaign would be depicted on a tapestry.

I turned to Anne. “Does the palace in the empire have art like this?”

“Yes, but it’s all in storage, so I’ve never seen it.”

“Huh.”

The imperial family must’ve boasted quite the history—the current emperor certainly wasn’t the first of their dynasty. If their palace had something majestic on display depicting imperial ancestors in heroic situations, I felt like it could be used as a bluff.

“My father wasn’t interested in stuff like this at all,” Anne explained.

“Ah...” I’d only met him once, but even I’d been able to understand that. He probably knew he could make himself seem more powerful by displaying those sorts of tapestries—but he was so uninterested. He didn’t seem to care at all about that kind of merit.

We kept walking down the halls, and along the way, Bowman gave us some quick explanations about the art. Finally, after stopping at a moderately sized set of double doors, he said, “Here we are.”

The doors leading to the hall were large, which was an unusual sight in this estate. And since we'd just come from the guest waiting room, they didn't lead there. *Which means...*

"Is it all right for us to meet them in private?" I asked.

I guessed that this was the waiting room for the bride and groom. In my previous world, friends were allowed to meet the soon-to-be-married couple before the ceremony, but I wasn't sure if I was permitted to greet them so casually.

"Of course. I've received an order from my lord to allow his friends through. If I hadn't, I'd certainly be in trouble right now." Bowman gave us a wink. This gesture probably wasn't suitable for this occasion, but we, of course, didn't mind.

I nodded, and Bowman knocked on the door.

"Lord Eimoor, your friends have arrived—Sir Eizo and his family are here."

A familiar voice echoed from beyond the door, "Have them enter."

The servant opened the door, and I saw Marius dressed in luxurious clothing that I'd never seen before. Next to him was a beautiful woman wearing an equally stunning dress. Marius stood and welcomed us—the bride tried to stand as well, but Marius waved a hand to indicate that it wasn't necessary.

"Julie! Congratulations!"

"Diana! Thank you so much!"

Diana approached the woman, who I presumed was Marius's betrothed, and hugged her. It seemed universal (though we were currently in a different universe) that women would squeal with joy during times like these. *Don't cling to her too tightly, or you might ruin her dress.* The rest of the family approached Julie and offered their own words of congratulations. I extended my hand toward Marius.

"Congratulations," I said.

"Thank you. I was a bit worried that you might not come."

"It's my friend's wedding. Of course I'm here."

“I’m relieved to hear that.” His smile seemed nervous. “And thanks for the rings.”

“No worries. That project was a bit tough.” I offered a dry smile of my own, not bothering to hide my feelings. There weren’t a lot of metals as troublesome as meghizium—frankly, I doubted if it was even a metal at all.

“It seems like there’s a secret surrounding them too.”

I was taken aback. “Huh? Camilo didn’t tell you?”

“Nope. Didn’t say a word.” Marius shook his head. “He told me that I should hear about it directly from you.”

“Damn him... I’ll remember this,” I grumbled.

“So? What’s the big secret?”

I hesitated for a moment. *Is it better to stay quiet about this? No, I shouldn’t keep secrets about a gift.* I took some time to steel my resolve, then took a deep breath.

“Both rings have been blessed by a fairy.”

Marius tried to laugh at first, thinking I was joking. But when he saw my steadfast composure, he stared at me dubiously. “Are you serious?”

“Do you think I’d tell such a stupid lie? The chief of the fairies in the Black Forest personally blessed the rings—the couple wearing them will be shielded from any misfortune. Your ring should protect you from anything troublesome.”

Marius’s eyes widened in shock. I wondered whether he’d regret accepting such an unbelievable gift, but the second he snapped out of his daze, he rushed over to Julie and raised her in the air.

“Ha ha ha!” he laughed. “My friend never ceases to surprise me! He had the rings blessed by a fairy! Isn’t that amazing, Julie?!”

Julie’s eyes also went wide as she glanced toward Diana. When Diana nodded back, Julie’s smile became radiant. “Yes, it truly is!”

The happy couple laughed with each other. *If I were to weave a tapestry, I would choose this exact moment to forever etch into history—they both look*

truly happy. I didn't expect them to be this elated by this revelation. A small drop of emotion spilled from the corner of my eye, and I discreetly wiped it away with my hand.

"Ah, one more thing," I said, still trying to hide my feelings. I had something else to give to the happy couple.

After handing the box with the knives to Rike, I glanced over at Diana, who gave a nod—this signaled that it wasn't a problem for me to directly hand them my gifts. Julie still seemed blown away by my words as I handed over the knife I'd made for her.

"This is a present from all of us at Forge Eizo. This one's for you, Julie."

She gently took the knife in her hands, and her eyes sparkled as she saw the painted engraving of a rose.

"This is a custom knife forged in a Nordic style, but it's filled with wishes that will chase away anything malicious. Of course, as it's a blade, you can use it to defend yourself," I explained.

"Thank you." Julie's voice was full of gratitude, her tone like the clear chiming of bells. I thought that was fitting for her appearance.

"That scabbard looks unusual. Is the blade a *katana* from the Nordic region?" Marius asked, unable to hide his interest.

I nodded. "It's short and doesn't have a sword guard, but yes, the blade is a *katana*."

"I see."

"And here's one for you."

I took the other knife from Rike and handed it to him. He stared at it intently. "Looks like a normal knife," he murmured.

"I made Julie's a bit more fashionable, but you can't have your blade standing out, right?"

"I see. Can I unsheathe it?"

"If it's not a problem to do so before the ceremony, feel free."

Since he'd posed the question, it didn't seem like a problem, but in my previous world, some saw this as bad luck. Marius gingerly pulled the knife from its scabbard, and the engraved rose glinted in the room's light. Julie let out a gasp of astonishment.

"I wanted it to match Julie's—a wedded set."

"I see."

Julie's scabbard and Marius's knife sat side by side, and two flowers bloomed simultaneously, resembling the happy couple.

"Are these both...?" Marius asked.

"That's right. The same quality as the sword," I replied with a nod.

Both knives were custom models—they were indeed the same quality as the blade I'd forged to replace the Eimoor family heirloom. However, my skills had improved since then, and I was now able to use as much magical energy as I wanted, so the knives may have been even better quality.

"I'll be careful when wielding this," Marius said.

"Please do. They cut very well."

"I know, I know."

Marius's smile came out somewhat forced. He knew how well my custom models could cut things, and I was sure he wouldn't be careless.

"Eizo, thank you. Truly."

"I'd like to thank you as well," Julie said.

As they both tried to bow their heads, I waved my hands to stop them. "You can say that after the ceremony. And besides..."

"Besides?" The bride and groom looked at each other.

"My friend's getting married. There's no need for your gratitude."

Marius's face broke out into a goofy grin for a moment before he regained his usual composed, handsome demeanor. "Got it. Then I'll see you later."

"Sure."

And with that, I headed to the door. Diana and the rest of my family bid Julie farewell and followed me. Bowman, who'd been waiting on the other side of the door, led the way once more. I was familiar with this corridor, and I guessed that we were headed to the grand hall.

As we walked, I turned to Diana and whispered, "Do you think I tried too hard to act cool back there?"

"A little. But still, thank you."

Her words of gratitude put a bit of pep in my step.

Chapter 14: A Lively Banquet

We proceeded down the corridor with Bowman walking ahead. My surroundings were as calm as ever, and the lively chatter that would certainly accompany the ceremony hadn't reared its head just yet. I saw two birds chirping at each other as though they were engaged in a pleasant conversation. *Maybe the birds can also tell that this is a joyous day.*

We eventually reached a large door that I recognized—it led to the grand hall. Bowman opened it and beckoned us inside.

"Wow."

I wasn't sure who expressed their awe first—it could've been me. The hall had looked much plainer during the succession celebration, but it was now adorned with ornate decorations. The large tables positioned around the room were also embellished with fancy ornaments. *A count's wedding sure is luxurious...* This was an opportunity to display not only social influence but also wealth.

"Over here, please," Bowman directed. "The other guests will enter momentarily."

The servants on standby in the hall pulled out some chairs for us. We were seated at the end of the table—these were lower seats for those who weren't guests of honor. *But it's not that Marius thinks that we're of little importance. He probably designated these seats for us so that we could avoid clashing with aristocrats as much as possible.* If Marius was truly mocking our low social standing, he wouldn't have prepared a separate room just for us or allowed us to meet him before the ceremony.

We obediently sat down. There were fluffy cushions atop the seats, and I guessed that all the chairs had one. Samya sat next to me, restlessly glancing around. I considered giving her a warning, but Diana and Anne didn't seem to mind, so I let her do as she pleased. *I'm sure she'll calm down when other people enter.*

On my opposite side, the seat was empty, implying that it was reserved for a different guest. *Now, I wonder who that might be.* As I confirmed my surroundings, others began to enter, true to Bowman's words. These guests were being guided by Catalina and the other servants. At once, Samya stopped glancing around.

Everyone was dressed in elegant clothes. Some garments looked a bit plain at a glance, but upon closer inspection, they were festooned with intricate embroidery, clearly displaying the time and effort required to make them. It went without saying that in terms of rank (barring Diana and Anne), these guests were all much higher than my family. I glanced at Bowman, wondering if we should stand up for them, but he replied with a discreet shake of his head. Taking his kind guidance, I remained seated, but I also didn't brazenly glance at the other guests' faces.

I'd planned on keeping my line of sight low, but a certain person caught my eye. He was a man of impressive physique, enveloped in expensive attire and wearing a medal. He noticed my gaze and grinned at me before taking the seat by my side. While the other aristocrats all sat down for conversation, I decided to open my mouth.

"These are the lower seats, good sir," I said. "I feel someone of your status is more suitable for the higher seats of this table."

"Ah, have I made you upset somehow?" the man replied.

"Oh no, not at all."

He laughed. "Now, now. Don't look so abhorred."

The man who'd sat next to me was none other than Margrave Menzel. Even if he wasn't willing to outclass the parents of the bride and groom, he was certainly not a man who should've been seated here. I remembered a time in my previous world when my boss had sat next to me during a small party—he'd probably taken the seat simply because it had been open, but I'd been surprised and nervous the entire time.

"I don't hate you or anything..." I started.

"While I have the title of margrave and am connected to both the bride and

the groom, I'm just the groom's father's friend," he replied with a laugh. "And to the bride, I'm just a simple relative."

That totally makes you an honored guest. I didn't dare vocalize my thoughts.

"I don't like stiff occasions myself. It's easier and more comfortable to be by your side. I'm sure you feel the same, don't you?" he asked.

To the margrave, it apparently seemed like I'd requested to be seated here so that I could avoid any troublesome situations. *And honestly, he's not that far off. His intuition's really something.*

"I do," I replied. "If a noblewoman I'd never met before was next to me, I would've been much more nervous."

The margrave's eyes widened and he erupted in hearty laughter. "Ha ha! Of course! Of course!"

Guests were seated on the long sides of the table. This, of course, meant that someone else was sitting across from us. If there had been fewer guests, an open chair might have been left to separate our group from the others. However, this wedding was held in accordance with Marius's respectable position as a count, and many people were present. If the margrave had also been involved in making preparations, it was vital to show off Marius's social connections. Aristocratic society was less forgiving than a merchant's; one couldn't risk being looked down upon.

Across from us sat Leroy, the adjutant during the monster subjugation campaign. I hadn't seen him for a long while, but we were friends. It seemed Marius had made sure that the people around me were only those I was familiar with. *This does make it easier for me.*

The tables were rather wide—to converse with someone across from us, we would need to raise our voices a little, which would sound a bit loud and unruly. It would do neither me nor Leroy any favors to attract the attention of others, so I instead raised my hand for a brief greeting. He did the same.

"Oh? Are you friends with the son of the McMahons?" whispered the margrave.

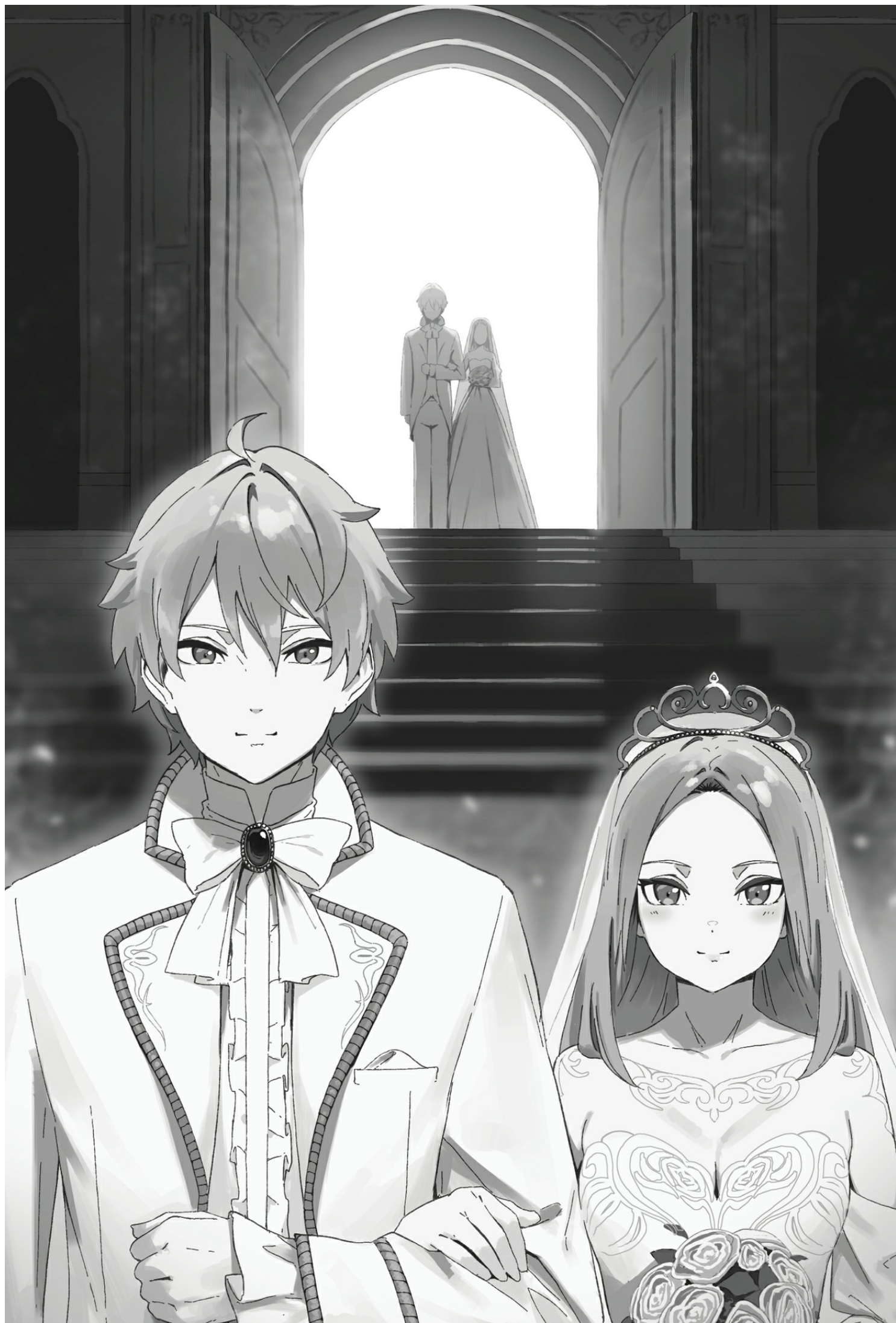
"Yeah. We met during the campaign."

The margrave nodded. “Ah, he was the adjutant, wasn’t he?” His sharp eye only attested to his abilities as an aristocrat—it was something I couldn’t mimic.

Since the margrave had wanted to hear about the campaign, I used this as a segue to tell him a few stories. Marius had filed a proper report on the events, which Margrave Menzel had read, but he wanted my point of view as a person on the front lines. I obviously hid the fact that I’d slain a hobgoblin (I said that it’d been defeated before I knew it... I couldn’t exactly tell him who’d been the slayer). Altogether, he seemed satisfied by my stories.

Bowman, who’d disappeared without me noticing, returned to the halls, dressed in attire that looked slightly more lavish than before. It seemed like he was emceeding this ceremony, so he needed to look suitable for the occasion. The noise from the guests naturally died down, and Bowman cleared his throat. *Huh, I guess even he gets nervous at times.*

“Thank you for your patience, everyone. Please welcome the bride and groom.”



A door, different from the ones where the guests had entered, opened. A ray of light shone out, illuminating the happy couple. *Maybe there's a window across from the doors. Was this place designed for that sort of entry?* If so, I was sure that an extremely skilled craftsman had been tasked with the job. *And it's been used to light up the people at every occasion, just like now.*

Amidst the long history of this venue, a new family was about to be born. The relaxed smiles the bride and groom had worn earlier were gone, replaced with nervous expressions. *How will this ceremony proceed?* I didn't see a pastor or anyone to officiate the wedding. Would they declare their vows publicly in front of the guests?

The two approached a different table—positioned so that they'd be in the higher-ranked section—and turned their backs to us.

"Please rise." Bowman's voice echoed through the halls.

We all stood up and faced the bride and groom. Only the margrave left the table and approached the front. He stood between the table and the happy couple.

"Now, for the wedding vows," the margrave announced.

The bride and groom each gave a firm nod; I could discern their gestures, even though their backs were turned. Marius put his hand over a stack of paper documents and spoke in a clear voice.

"I, Marius Eimoor, take you, Julie Derangère, to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow."

"I, Julie Derangère, take you, Marius Eimoor, to be my husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, to love and to support, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow."

The margrave nodded at their words then bellowed loudly, "Should anyone have any objections, voice them now!"

And of course, no one had anything to say. Once silence fell upon us, the margrave gave a nod of satisfaction.

“Then by an overwhelming majority of the attendants, under the name of Margrave Menzel, I, Gregor, shall pronounce you man and wife.”

He took a writing utensil offered by Bowman and penned his signature on the paper. The bride and groom did the same. The margrave confirmed the document, folded it up, and sealed it—the seal depicted the Menzel family crest.

“Julie Derangère,” said the margrave.

“Yes.”

“From henceforth, you shall be known as Julie Derangère Eimoor.”

“Yes.”

“Congratulations.”

“Thank you!”

Her tearful voice quavered as thunderous applause erupted within the hall. Bowman swiftly produced an item wrapped in a cloth and gave it to the margrave.

“And now...”

Margrave Menzel pushed aside the cloth, revealing two golden rings sitting next to each other. Taking the rings and facing one another, the bride and groom each gently slipped a ring onto their spouse’s finger. Their gazes intertwined.

Oh? Are they gonna do the kiss? I managed to stay silent and not vocalize my thoughts, which were most fitting for a vulgar old man. *I’m not even drunk...*

The two did indeed kiss very lightly, and loud applause once again boomed within the venue. Marius and Julie were now officially a married couple. As I applauded with the rest, I felt my chest grow warm and fuzzy.

“Thank you for your blessings. Please take your seats,” Bowman said.

We all followed his request and the margrave returned to his chair by my side. Drinking goblets were immediately placed on the tables, and wine-like liquor was poured. The goblet, perhaps for safety reasons as glass or porcelain

might shatter, was made from wood. However, these weren't crude cups that could be found in a commoner's house—they were neatly polished and fitting for a count's wedding.

A banquet followed, and I figured it was best to remain seated during this occasion. In my previous world, this would be the time to pour beer into a relative's glass, receive some alcohol in return, or go over to the bride and groom to fool around. This world didn't seem to follow that custom. *Ah, well, that kind of laid-back atmosphere is probably unbefitting a count's wedding.*

"I'd like to thank everyone for gathering today," Marius said in a sonorous voice. Perhaps relieved that the hardest bit was over, he now seemed more relaxed. "We're still young and inexperienced. It hasn't been long since I became the master of the count's household. I hope to continue to mature, so I hope for everyone's kind guidance and advice in the future."

He raised his goblet into the air. "Truly, I'd like to thank each and every one of you here today. A toast to my treasured guests!"

We all raised our goblets and shouted, "Cheers!"

I thought the margrave was going to deliver the toast, so I was caught off guard. Even so, I mimicked the other guests and drank the contents of my cup. It was delicious, though I expected that it contained quite a bit of alcohol—I decided to restrain myself a bit since I was bad at holding my booze. The margrave, on the other hand, was gulping it down.

At the previous banquet, the meal had been distributed in a seemingly random fashion, but today it was carefully served, one dish at a time. The servants busily crowded the table and plated the food. While we were waiting, the margrave engaged in some small talk with me.

"You've got a dwarf at your place too?" he asked.

"Huh? Er, yes, I do."

"An apprentice of yours?"

"That's right."

He nodded at my reply. "She drinks very well."

“That, I cannot deny.” I forced a smile.

Rike was gulping down her drinks just as swiftly as the margrave. Since the first toast, she’d had two cups, and a third was being poured. Diana and Anne didn’t seem to stop her, so I left her under their care. And the margrave seemed aware of dwarven habits. A person of his status probably needed to be aware of all sorts of information. *Yeah, I’m not suited to be an aristocrat.*

The dishes that were brought out were akin to a fusion of French and Italian cuisine. They seemed to come straight out of a luxurious restaurant, but the presentation was a bit more simple. Sauces didn’t decorate the dishes stylishly, and there weren’t any unusual vegetables piled on top.

The first dish was either a stewed or steamed root and potato garnished with some sauce. When I took a bite, the flavor of the vegetables and the citrus-based sauce filled my mouth. *Delicious.* I’d heard that unusual foods and spices were favored during these lavish celebrations. Taste wasn’t the primary issue; the fact that the host could afford these rare ingredients attested to his wealth and fame. However, it seemed Marius wasn’t willing to do such a thing.

The taste seemed familiar. *Did I eat this at a wedding in my previous world?* The last wedding I’d attended had been my subordinate’s, but it’d been years ago and my memory had gotten hazy.

“This is delicious.”

“Indeed. It speaks to the chef’s skills.”

After the (presumably) hors d’oeuvres, a small meat dish appeared in front of me. It was seasoned, but spice didn’t cover the entirety of the meat’s surface. I took my knife and cut off a piece to carry into my mouth. My eyes widened in astonishment when the meat hit my tongue. The seasonings gave it a bit of a kick, and it was indeed delicious, but this dish hinted at who the chef was.

Samya took a bite and seemed to have the same reaction as me. She whispered in my ear. “Hey, is this...”

“Yeah,” I replied with a nod. “This is probably Pops’s cooking.”

“Thought so.”

With a contented smile, Samya took another bite. “Mmm!” she said happily. The taste was to her liking.

I was eating at a separate table from Marius, but when I glanced up, I happened to catch his eye. I pointed toward the dish, and he gave me his usual, mischievous smirk. His expression faded so quickly that I thought I was seeing things for a moment. I gave a small sigh. *I’m sure of it. This is Sandro’s cooking. I’m guessing Boris and Martin are with him too. I guess Pops got wrapped up in all this.* I imagined him grumbling while looking ecstatic as he loudly gave instructions to Boris and Martin... It made me chuckle.

The meal was an overall quiet affair. No one stood up and walked around to greet others. Since I was sitting at the end of the table, I didn’t feel many gazes on me either. *And if they tried to stare at us, they’d naturally see the margrave too—it’d be rude to stare at him.* Marius’s goodwill had worked very well, and I smacked my lips as I enjoyed Pops’s food.

No one, including the margrave, dared to speak carelessly. The topic of the seventh imperial princess being present among us was never touched upon. She was drinking at a relatively fast pace, but she still seemed levelheaded and was able to respond calmly. However, as she continued to consume a few more glasses, she pretended to look my way but glanced behind me. I didn’t follow her gaze, but I guessed that she was staring at Helen.

Helen was polishing off her food at an alarming pace. It wasn’t the best of manners, but it didn’t make anyone narrow their eyes at her. The others were a bit more graceful and ladylike. Though their behavior might have seemed a bit forced, these were the results of Diana and Anne’s lessons. *I mean, the daughter of a count and the imperial princess personally taught them manners.*

The end of the banquet was quickly approaching. For dessert, we got some citrus that looked similar to a grapefruit. It didn’t have much bitterness or sourness and was very sweet. I was a bit surprised to see it; this world seemed filled with more native or ancestral fruits. There was the possibility that this variety had been selectively bred. While I enjoyed the dessert, the margrave glanced around at my family.

“Sorry,” he muttered under his breath.

I guessed he was referring to our situation. He spoke softly so that no one would notice a margrave apologizing to a mere blacksmith. Helen and Anne had come to me partly because they'd gotten involved with the margrave. *The same goes for me, though.* With the power of alcohol, the door that kept his apologies hidden away had slowly started to crack open.

"About what?" I replied. I chose to play dumb. At the end of the day, I didn't feel inconvenienced at all.

The margrave gave a very, very small sigh and a dry smile. "I think you should rely on others a tad bit more."

He may have been right. Every member of our family, each with their own strong points, lived under the same roof. When told that I should put their talents to better use, I could only agree. But I wasn't willing to obediently acquiesce to the margrave's words.

"I'll think about it," I replied stiffly.

The margrave offered another forced smile.

Like at the previous party, after the banquet, there was a ball. Bowman guided us all, including the bride and the groom, to a smaller hall. The aristocrats, now stuffed with food and drinks, would engage in conversation here.

An orchestra that'd been hired specifically for this purpose started to play. While this event was to essentially allow people to walk around and talk with others, it was under the guise of a ball—some kind of music was a necessity. I didn't really have anyone to connect with, barring the newly wedded couple. I tried to become a wallflower, allowing the rest of the family to do as they pleased, but none of us moved an inch. *What an ineffective wallflower I am, surrounded by an entire grove of blooms...* I was just about to suggest that everyone dance instead of sticking together in one big clump, when suddenly...

"Would you kindly dance with me?" a young woman asked.

But I'm a wallflower! The woman was wrapped in a pale yellow dress, and her silver hair had been cut in a neat bob. She was a bit shorter than me, and her overall attire didn't seem too extravagant, but in her silver, filigree-like locks

was a golden ornament fitted with a glittering ruby-red jewel. It was rather eye-catching.

“With...me?” I asked questioningly, pointing toward myself.

I felt an odd, murderous intent in the air (some of it aimed toward me), but this woman didn’t seem particularly suspicious. Samya and Helen stayed put, proving that the woman meant no harm. The only problem was that I hadn’t the faintest clue about her identity. I frantically racked my brain for memories dating back to the day I’d come to this world, but she didn’t ring a bell. *Does she just one-sidedly know me?*

“Yes,” she replied with a smile and quiet nod. I glanced toward Diana and Anne for some help.

Diana quickly approached me and whispered softly, “It’s rude to reject a woman’s offer, so it’s best if you accept it.”

“I’m not agreeing to start some kind of weird relationship, am I?” I whispered back.

I felt a painful pinch on my back. *Ah, I suppose a hit to the shoulders here would be unladylike.*

I hid my pain and smiled at the woman. “I’m not used to these situations, so I may seem a bit unsightly. But if you don’t mind that, I’ll gladly accept.”

“Of course. You can rely on me.”

Another soft smile. I took her hand and walked toward an open area. The orchestra, which had been performing lively, fast-paced music—possibly to mask the conversations—now switched to a song with a slower tempo. However, as though to make up for the slow pace, they played the music even louder.

Are they trying to match my rhythm, or is this just a coincidence? Finding no use in overthinking this situation, I took the woman’s hands and started dancing to the music. Had I been to social dances in my previous world, I would’ve been much better—unfortunately, I had no such experience. Needless to say, the Watchdog hadn’t given me a dancing cheat ability, so I knew I looked awful.

My lack of ability was easily exposed after a few quick steps. I felt like I heard some kind of dry laugh or mocking voice above the music—this woman had surely heard it as well. I doubted that she wanted to be humiliated with me.

“What would you like to talk with me about?” I asked.

“Oh dear, what if I said that I wanted to simply dance with you?” she replied. “It looks like you don’t believe me.”

I knitted my brows for a moment when she sounded a bit mischievous, but the woman quickly gave up. It was likely that I just looked a bit scary, though that seemed effective against her.

“Then I suppose I won’t beat around the bush. My name is Annette.” She gave an elegant bow with the rhythm, making it seem like it was part of the dance. I bowed as well. “To be rather blunt, I’m a dependent of the kingdom’s royal family.”

I almost completely froze, but she swiftly tugged on my hands and moved me along with her.

“Since I’m here, I’ll divulge—I *am* interested in you, but I’m not your enemy. In terms of standing, it’s quite the opposite.”

“I can’t just believe that without question,” I said frankly, trying to remain as expressionless as possible.

She gave me a forced laugh. “That’s true.” No one felt good when they aroused suspicion.

“And what business do you have with me?” I asked. “If you’re looking for custom models...”

“The person making the request must venture alone to your forge in the middle of the Black Forest, correct?”

“Correct.”

My steps are all over the place when I talk while dancing. I almost kept tripping and was barely keeping myself together.

“I’m not quite interested in that at the moment,” Annette said. “To spill a few more details...my main job is to be something like a spy.”

Alarm bells sounded; my warning level rose a notch. *This is like DEFCON 4.*

“But I’m not planning anything in particular today,” she added. “I’m just here to maintain relationships with others.”

“I see.”

My reply was completely shut off from my emotions. Annette once again offered a strained smile.

“A troublesome matter is about to occur, and I was thinking that I might make a request of you,” explained Annette. “You may be one of the final aces up my sleeve, or something very close to that. But it’d be too late if we got acquainted after that situation occurred, so I thought it best to get familiar beforehand.”

“And it’s a perfect opportunity for you to sneak in.”

“Precisely,” she said with a knowing smile. “So I hope we can maintain a good relationship. Ah, you may explain this to your family however you wish, including the princess, of course. I wouldn’t want to trouble the imperial family.”

“I’m grateful for that.”

If I’d had to keep this a secret, it would’ve required a convincing cover story. It was easier to tell them the truth. *But I don’t know how much they’ll believe...*

The song concluded. Annette and I bowed toward each other and then returned to our respective places. We were surrounded by warm applause, a stark contrast to our risky conversation.

As I returned to my family, they all applauded as well. However, they stared with half-warm and half-cold gazes.

“That was rough,” I said.

“It wasn’t bad, but maybe you need a few lessons,” Diana replied with a smile.

“Hear, hear,” added Anne with a grin. “It might be best if you remember both the kingdom’s and the empire’s dances.”

These two were the best teachers I could get for etiquette and the like. There

must've been numerous young, aristocratic ladies who'd be desperate to be taught by these two. But unfortunately, I was a thirty-year-old man and a blacksmith. *Even if I learn to dance, I don't think I'll do it often.*

I gave a strained laugh. "Well, please kindly teach me if you're willing."

The rest of our family smiled. Normally, they'd laugh loudly here, but they were mindful of the setting.

"And?" Diana asked, her grin fading. "What happened?"

They were already aware that I didn't have a romantic conversation with Annette. *Or maybe, if they thought I had, they'd glare at me and try to find out the details.*

"It was just a simple greeting," I replied. "She said she was a spy working directly under the royal family."

"She wanted to get to know you before things turned ugly?" Anne asked.

"I'd expect no less from a princess. You're sharp. That's exactly what her intentions were. She didn't seem to be in a rush."

"No one has time for leisurely greetings during dire events."

Anne sounded a little bored, but it was unusual for a blacksmith like me to be involved in difficult situations.

"I wonder if she was fine with greeting me first," I said. "She bypassed the newly wedded couple and the guest of honor."

"I'm guessing that the guest of honor is the one behind all this," Anne replied with a small huff.

Well, that *was* par for the course for him. If he had an opportunity—even at his darling relative's wedding—he'd take it.

"I see."

Diana leveled me with a serious look. "If it really is a difficult matter, feel free to decline."

That was tricky—if I refused the royal family's request, I'd earn the ire of the Eimoors, the margrave, and even the royal family. Diana was worried that,

because of this, I'd nod my head at any matter that came my way. Her reasoning was sound, and frankly, I would've agreed with her. In a roundabout way, my friend's safety was at stake. However, I already had my priorities sorted out.

"I care the most about my daily life with our family," I asserted.

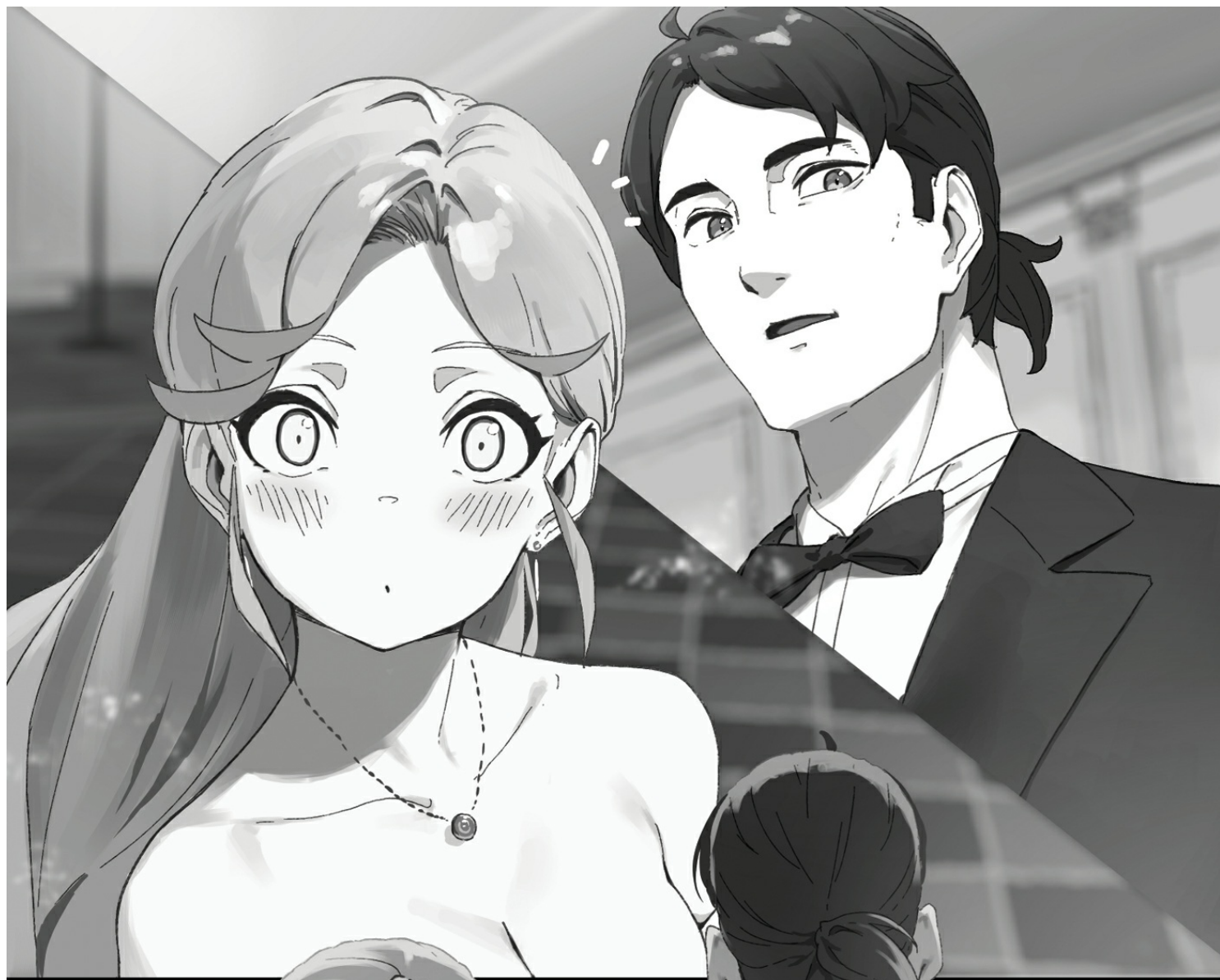
At my words, Diana seemed happy, but also a bit sad.

"While celebrations like these are an exception..." I paused, gathering my thoughts. "If our family's livelihood is at stake, I'll do whatever it takes to resolve the issue." I chose my words carefully. I couldn't exactly say, "I'd protect you from anything that makes you sad, Diana." But, should anything occur to the empire, Rike's hometown, the Black Forest, or the elves' village, I'd lend my power without fail.

I'd also do anything that would allow me to live a quiet and peaceful life in the future. *Ah, I suppose I am wrapped up in too many things.*

My smile was strained, but I met her eyes nonetheless. "Thank you for worrying about me, Diana."

Her only reply was a deep flush, and I felt a very slight pain on my shoulder.



“In any case, no one is coming to talk to us,” I remarked, sweeping my gaze across the ballroom.

Every aristocrat had found their partner and struck up a conversation. My awkward stumbling earlier had seemed to trigger others to start dancing—they even looked a bit more relaxed. But ultimately, Annette was the only guest who’d approached us. I was just a middle-aged man, but the women around me were flowery and beautiful, so I’d expected some younger men to approach our group.

“It’s probably because you spoke so casually with the margrave during the banquet,” Diana said with a small sigh. “A mysterious man—clearly not a person from around here—conversed with Margrave Menzel like an old friend. It makes sense that the aristocrats were left wondering.”

Anne nodded. “The enigmatic man is also surrounded by women—a daughter of the Eimoor household and the Lightning Strike are in the mix. Additionally, he’s accompanied by a dwarf, a beastfolk, an elf, and a giant. Eizo, I doubt any person could even hazard a guess about your identity, and they surely don’t know how to strike up a conversation with you.”

“Huh,” I muttered. “So people see me as some mysterious aristocrat?”

“What? You only noticed that now?”

“I sort of had an inkling, but it only started to sink in when you verbalized it.”

I gave a small frown, and the rest of the family smiled.

Chapter 15: The End of the Banquet

“Anyway, I think Diana and the rest of you should head over to the newlyweds,” I said.

The bride and groom finally seemed to have some free time on their hands. I decided to stay where I was and let the rest offer their greetings—as I thought about the future, I realized that the ladies of my household wouldn’t have the opportunity to meet with Marius and Julie often. For Diana especially, this was a chance for her to catch up with her only brother and her friend. The women hesitated for a moment but then immediately started walking toward the couple.

As they went, I softly called out, “But go easy on them!”

Samya gave a wave of her hand in reply. *Were my habits rubbing off on her?* I didn’t think her actions were the most ladylike, but no one was there to scold her for it. After all, I was apparently a “mysterious aristocrat.” If anyone dared to reprimand one of us, only to find out that we were actually a very important group of nobles from a different country, it could turn into an international issue. Above all, it would be slandering Marius’s name since he’d invited us as his guests. I doubted anyone would be so bold.

“Good grief.”

I sighed. Gently rolling my shoulders, I realized that I’d been nervous ever since the start of the banquet. *And the margrave was right next to me. Wait, where is he now? I don’t want him to catch me while I’m alone.* Hastily, I glanced around.

“And who might you be looking for?” asked a low voice. His tone wasn’t as imposing as the margrave’s—it honestly sounded a bit frivolous.

“I’m not seeking out someone to talk to,” I replied, not looking toward the source of that extremely familiar voice. “Quite the opposite, actually,”

“I hope it’s not *me* you’re avoiding.”

“Of course not. In fact, I thought you might not even be here.” I gave an awkward chuckle at this farce and turned to face him. “Where’ve you been, Camilo?”

He was dressed in splendid attire, and his physique could frankly rival the margrave’s. I extended my hand and he shook it while patting my shoulder.

“I was in the back,” he replied. “I had quite a few things to take care of.”

“So that’s why you weren’t at the banquet.”

“Yep. I basically had the same meal as you guys, but in a separate room. I just finished eating.”

“Pops’s cooking can’t be beat.”

“Agreed.” Camilo grinned.

“You done socializing with the aristocrats?” I asked.

“I don’t need to urgently network with any of the people here. And I’ve already privately congratulated the newly wedded couple.” He shrugged.

From a merchant’s point of view, this banquet apparently wasn’t the ideal place to make connections. *I should always assume that these occasions call for a bit of networking.* Back in my previous life, I recalled two people meeting at a mutual friend’s wedding—from there, friendship had blossomed, and the relationship had escalated until they’d eventually married.

“I guess two middle-aged men like us should just become lonely wallflowers,” I said.

“Right.”

Camilo and I entertained ourselves with some small talk, but as we did, I felt gazes from around the room land upon me. I’d casually talked with the margrave and the count, and now I was conversing with a merchant who had ties to both these aristocrats. I guessed that people were trying to put the pieces together and gauge my social standing. *I feel like my position is becoming even more of a mystery in aristocratic society...but I guess I won’t be bothered by that.*

Though today’s banquet was held only for family and close friends, Marius

was planning to have a small parade within the city in the near future. Camilo would be arranging that as well.

“Sounds like a bit of a pain,” I remarked.

“Which is why I turn a greater profit,” he replied.

“Makes sense.”

A parade would probably cost a decent amount of money, which would be great for the one paid to organize it. If Camilo continued to accept these jobs and prospered even further, it would make me happy. *I can't deny that it's partially because he's my friend.*

“By the way, there's going to be a changeover in the magistrate, isn't there?” I asked. “Is Leroy going to take over soon?”

“That's what I've heard. Baron Kielstedt is the current magistrate, but he's dying to retire.” Camilo looked around the room, then discreetly gestured. “Oh, he's over there, talking to the margrave.”

I gazed in that direction and spied an old man—he looked intelligent and was holding his own while conversing with the margrave. The old man had a white beard and white hair, which was slicked back. Though his attire gave off an aristocratic aura, his physical features make him look more like a wizard who'd thrown away a ring—like from a movie I'd seen back on Earth.

“Marius is keeping him, you know,” Camilo said. “Even if the baron retires, I'm sure he'll still sort of be like a father figure to the count.”

“I see.” I internally bowed my head to my friend's father figure.

A short while later, Bowman's clear voice rang out. “I know the banquet is reaching its peak, but I believe we should be drawing this celebration to a close.”

Is it already that late? I wondered.

Soon, Marius stepped to the center of the hall. “I'd like to thank each and every one of you for attending today,” he said loudly, voice full of gratitude. “We're still young and we have much to learn, but I'd appreciate it if you would continue to watch over us.”

Applause echoed throughout the hall and continued for a while, as though to symbolize the size of our blessing.

This world didn't have a custom where wedded couples would give guests thank-you gifts at the reception. Besides, there weren't many items suitable to distribute to this particular guest list—food or other perishable items would have only caused more problems. I thought back to my previous world. *Do countries other than Japan have that tradition too?* I was never all that excited to receive celebratory items from other families.

At a later date, I asked Anne if aristocrats gave food or other gifts during times of celebration.

"I'm sure commoners might, but between aristocrats, they'd always have to suspect the food being laced with poison...so probably not."

"Even if they're close friends?"

"Even then," she replied. "For example, let's say you gave your friend bread and he died soon after eating it. The bread wasn't laced with poison, but another item he touched may have been, or he'd simply suddenly died of natural causes. You'd still be suspected, wouldn't you?"

"Right. That's true."

That scenario made logical sense—if someone received a gift of food, ate it, then ate something else laced with poison (even something they ingested daily) and immediately dropped dead, the gift would obviously be scrutinized. Though there was a low possibility of this happening, if the victim happened to suddenly die of a stroke or heart attack, the gift giver would become a suspect. I would've thought this even in my previous world, but it would be even more of a concern in this one.

All this considered, thank-you gifts weren't distributed, and the guests left the hall in the order they arrived. In the weddings I was familiar with, the married couple and their family would be thanking the guests by the door, but there was no such tradition here. The guests were called out whenever their carriage was prepared for departure. My family would be leaving last since we had to change our clothes.

The margrave lingered for a lot longer than I'd expected. Since he was an aristocrat, I'd thought he would leave early on, but rank didn't seem to matter in his case.

I asked Anne about this later as well, and she replied, "If people leave in order of rank, it'd be obvious that the person who leaves first is of the highest standing. That would leave the perfect opening to launch some sort of surprise attack, so it's best for guests to leave in an order not associated with status."

I've still got so much to learn.

The margrave firmly clasped my shoulder before he left. Helen tried to step forward, but I stopped her with my hand.

"I'll leave it to you," he said.

I wasn't sure if he was referring to the newly wedded couple, the kingdom, or perhaps Helen. But it would've been crass of me to ask him in that moment. Instead, I silently nodded. I didn't care about the kingdom, but I didn't need to be told twice about the other two possibilities. Using my middle-aged man's intuition, I surmised that he wasn't referring to the kingdom anyway.

The margrave gave a satisfied nod before he gallantly walked out. He must've had quite a bit to drink, but his steps were firm and stable. Still, since he was able to say those words to me, I knew that the alcohol had gotten to him a bit.

A few other guests left the venue, and we were left with just the bride and groom. Julie's family had moved to a separate room, and Camilo was already gone.

"Thank you for coming today," Marius said, extending his hand to me.

"The pleasure is all mine," I replied, clasping it. "Thanks for inviting me on this joyous occasion. Truly, I'm honored. I'm wishing you two eternal happiness."

I was sure Marius would be faced with trials and tribulations in the future, but I hoped he and Julie would support each other to overcome any hardships. *Their rings are blessed and will protect them from misfortune—I'm sure they won't be caught up in too much. Well, that's what Gizelle said, anyway.*

Marius lifted his other hand. "The payment for the rings has been prepared

for you in a separate room. Please accept it.”

“All right. You won’t be handing it to us personally, I take it?”

“Nope.”

He grinned. I guessed that he had his own reasons. After all, he’d just married. Those two would surely want some time alone soon, and I didn’t pry further.

Bowman seamlessly slipped into the conversation, guiding us from the party. “This way, please.”

We all followed him. Right before I left the hall, I turned around and called out to Marius. “Those two blades are gifts!”

Marius laughed and replied just as loudly. “I know!”

Bowman led us around the manor. The women soon broke off and headed into a room—I entered a separate room by myself where servants were waiting. *Time to get these formal clothes off.* The servants swiftly removed everything and I slipped back into my normal attire.

A little wave of relief washed over me. I rolled my shoulders and muttered, “Aristocratic clothing’s a bit too much for my taste.”

“Is that so?” a servant asked. “You looked very good in it.”

“Really? My current clothes are more comfortable and suit me better, I think.”

“I understand the feeling.”

We smiled at each other. *How long will I know these servants? I hope we can be more casual and friendly without sounding so nervous.* After I finished changing, Bowman once again took the lead.

“This way, please.”

I’d become quite indebted to him as well, and I hoped that I could return the favor one day. *Maybe I’ll ask Marius about it next time.* If I told him that I wanted to surprise the servants, I was sure he’d happily lend me his help.

I was careful to not let my intentions be known as I proceeded down the corridor and into a snug room. The women still needed some more time to

change, so I was the first to arrive. *I mean, they've gotta get out of those dresses and remove their makeup.* I'd expected them to take more time, so I sat down and decided to wait patiently.

Bowman soon received a bag from a servant outside of the room, and he brought it over to me. "This is the payment from our master. Please confirm it for me."

"Got it."

When he placed the bag in my hand, I noticed that it was rather hefty. *If this weight is all from gold coins, there must be quite a few inside. Working with meghizium was a good learning experience for me, so I don't need this much money.* When I opened the bag and placed the contents on the table, there were several gold coins, as I'd expected. But this quantity wasn't enough to warrant the weight. When I stuck my hand inside once more, I removed a goldish-blue chunk of metal that was slightly larger than the size of my fist.

"What is this?" I asked, glancing at Bowman.

He gave a rare, mischievous smile, one that resembled Marius's plotting grin. "That's adamantite. It's part of your payment."

He said it in a casual manner, his smile unwavering. I understood his words, but it took time for me to process them.

I froze.

"Ada...mantite..."

"Correct." Bowman still wore that smile. His simple affirmation had made it sound like he was only stating the obvious.

When I once again held the metal in my hands, I noticed that it seemed to weigh more than its size would suggest. I wasn't sure just how refined this chunk was, but if it was mostly pure, it was enough to forge a knife and have some left over. Hardness was the defining characteristic of adamantite, so I considered creating a rapier—a thin, yet sturdy blade. I probably didn't have enough for a normal longsword.

It was easy for me to guess that this lump had been *very* expensive. While I

had received a difficult request, the materials had been provided for me, so the only costs were labor fees. In terms of payment, this seemed far too excessive.

“I believe the adamantite alone is more than enough for payment,” I said.

“Indeed. Under normal circumstances, that would’ve been the case,” Bowman replied.

I wanted to imply that the gold coins were unnecessary, but he’d simply let my comment slide. *Under normal circumstances?*

“Then the gold coins were added because...?”

“Because you included the blessing to fight against misfortune. Is this payment too little for you?”

“O-Oh no, not at all!” I fumbled. “Quite the opposite.”

Though the rings had been blessed, I hadn’t intended for it to happen. It’s not as if I’d planned that from the start. As such, I wasn’t sure if I was allowed to receive money for it—I was fine with including the blessing for free, especially since I hadn’t been the one to actually cast it.

But, if I refused here, I would only trouble Bowman. I knew that Marius wasn’t the petty sort, but it would be disrespectful to reject an offered payment, and Bowman would have to take responsibility for not forcing me to accept the money. In other words, Marius had used Bowman so that I couldn’t refuse. I was an odd guest who would stubbornly deny the head of the house...but he knew I would act more reserved in front of the servants. *I have to hand it to you, Marius—this method is definitely effective.*

“I see.” I nodded, and with no other choice, relented. “All right, I surrender. I’ll gladly accept this payment.”

“We’d be very grateful if you did so,” Bowman replied, bowing deeply.

I bowed too. We didn’t keep bowing like drinking birds, but we did chuckle at each other. After a little while, the rest of our family entered the room with Catalina leading the way. They were all back into their usual clothes.

Samya and Diana were talking as they stepped inside, and I guessed that they’d been conversing on the way. No one had to hold back now that the

aristocrats were gone, and Diana was a lady of this household.

“I’m just letting you know, but Anne and I prefer our casual clothes,” said Diana.

“Really?” Samya replied, turning to Anne for confirmation.

The princess’s shoulders slumped in response. She hadn’t been wearing a corset beneath her dress, but the formal gown had still been laced tight.

“Some people dress that nice every day,” Diana explained. “Often, aristocrats simply don’t have enough time to change in between guests.”

Anne nodded. “My mother felt the same way. I didn’t think about it much when she first mentioned it, but she said that she’d rather spend minimal time wearing such formal attire.”

“Huh...” Samya murmured. “You guys have it tough.”

Lidy, Rike, and Helen all seemed surprised too. I thought that Helen might’ve also worn formal clothes more often, but I stayed silent.

Rike then noticed the metal lump on the table. “Ah! Could this be—?!” Eagerly, she leaped into the room.

“It’s adamantite, apparently,” I said.

“Incredible... So *this* is adamantite.”

I was glad she was back in her normal clothes. Her enthusiasm would’ve looked odd if she’d still been wearing that dress.

“You can touch it,” I said. “We received it as payment, so it’s ours.”

“Wow...” With sparkling eyes, Rike gingerly took the metal in her hands. She seemed to be barely able to form words. “Boss, are we gonna process this?”

“Hm? Let’s see...”

The rest of our family also seemed unable to contain their excitement. *I hope I’m not just imagining that.* I gave a small sigh.

“Let’s see,” I repeated. “We can’t work on this immediately upon returning home, but I do want to forge with this metal in the future. First, we’ve got the hihirokane, so it’ll take a while until we can get to this one.”

“Amazing!” Rike beamed. Everyone else looked at her, expressions a bit exasperated, but we all ultimately found her excitement adorable.

Suddenly, I remembered that the servants were still tending to us. “Ah, I’m sorry, Bowman. I guess we should be taking our leave.”

“Oh, please don’t apologize. Take your time.” He looked at Rike warmly, just as our family had done.

I quickly gathered the coins and adamantite from the table and stored them in the bag. “All right—let’s go.”

Voices of agreement rang out, and Bowman once again guided us.

“This way, please.”

Chapter 16: We're Home!

Bowman took us to the entrance of the manor. I'd hoped to drop in and show my face to Sandro, but that was apparently going to be difficult this time around. *He's more in the background than Camilo.* I decided to swing by his restaurant sometime. When Bowman opened the door, Krul and Lucy were waiting for us. Catalina had somehow beat us outside, and she was enjoying Lucy's fluffiness. Our pup was happily wagging her tail, happy to receive some attention from an older sister.

"Lucy, let's go home," I said.

"Arf!" Gracefully, she jumped onto our cart.

She doesn't look at all unsteady anymore—a sign that she's growing up. Catalina, who'd been petting and enjoying Lucy's fur just moments before, looked at us reproachfully.

I sighed heavily. "Don't stare at me like that." I wasn't going to leave Lucy here. She was a wolf and a magical beast, but first and foremost, she was part of our family. "You've got a large manor. Why don't you suggest keeping a guard dog?"

"Raise one up from a puppy?" Catalina asked.

"It's easier for a dog to get used to its home if it grows up there. I feel like a puppy would be best, if you can obtain one." I'd never had a pet in my previous world, but I guessed that the dog would be much happier if they grew up in an environment instead of being forced to adapt to one later in life.

"I see..." Catalina put a finger on her chin and seemed deep in thought.

Oh, looks like she's seriously considering it. The next time we come here, Lucy might have a playmate.

I hopped up onto the cart, then turned to the servants. "I'll see you all again. Thank you so much for today."

“Ah, my apologies. Please be careful on your way home,” Catalina said hastily, straightening her posture. She gave an elegant bow that made her aura completely different from moments ago. Though she had her own quirks, she wasn’t a bad person. And she was, of course, competent at her job. *She is...right?*

We all waved energetically as we bid the manor farewell. Lucy furiously wagged her tail—she seemed sad to leave the place. Catalina raised her head and waved back just as vigorously until we were out of sight.

“These formal occasions really do tire me out,” I said.

“You’ll get used to them if you keep attending,” Diana replied with a grin. Beside her, Anne smiled as well.

“Marius’s kind arrangements allowed me to shut out communication, but that’s not usual, is it?” I asked. “In the worst case, aristocratic conversations are used to find out other people’s intentions...or possibly even hurt one another. Right?”

“I suppose,” Anne replied. “There aren’t many good reasons to gather that many people together, and when it happens, there will always be that kind of talk. Especially so if someone’s future depends on it.”

“Ugh...” I groaned and furrowed my brow. Just listening to these stories gave me a stomachache. I would never grow accustomed to aristocratic society. “I think I’m more suited for a quiet life as a blacksmith in the forest.”

“Yes, I believe that’s best,” Lidy said firmly. She was an elf, and the magical energy from the forest suited her well. Thanks to her skills, we’d even been able to grow an entire garden full of crops.

I turned to her. “How are you feeling? You all right?”

“Yeah. That amount of time away from the forest is no problem at all,” she answered with a smile. She’d looked stunning in her dress, but seeing her usually happy expression made me feel relieved.

“I can’t really imagine you living outside of the forest,” Samya said to me.

“Me neither,” added Helen.

I'd already been living in the forest when we'd first met, so that was the only impression they had of me. However, smithing aside, if I was asked to live in the city, I would probably decline.

Rike looked a bit troubled. "Boss, if you quit being a blacksmith, it'd be a problem for me."

"That's the one thing that won't ever happen," I assured her. "You don't have to worry."

Rike breathed a large sigh of relief. I couldn't tell her that I lived the way I did because my cheat abilities were for blacksmithing. Regardless, I truly thought that this lifestyle suited me, and I had no intention of throwing that away.

Krul pulled the cart through the city streets and onto the main road. Gradually, the conversation shifted from today's banquet to matters at home. We discussed the currently growing crops, plans for salt-curing dried meat for the warmer seasons, and how we'd need to purchase more salt from Camilo for that purpose.

Little by little, our unusual day transitioned back to normalcy.

We approached the entrance to the forest. The waning sun had enveloped the world in its reddish rays. By the time we'd prepared the torches and were gazing beyond the grassy plains, half of the sun had already faded from view. A breeze rustled through the glimmering blades of grass, reflecting the dusky light. It looked like the sun was gently petting the greenery.

"I hope we can always remain this peaceful," I murmured.

Everyone nodded in agreement. The scenery in front of me looked so tranquil, but I knew that awful things were occurring out of my reach. I couldn't stop them all. Even with my cheat abilities, I was just a middle-aged blacksmith. *But even so...*

"I'll do whatever I can to maintain my family's peaceful life."

And I hope that becomes the norm for me. Once the sun had set, we lit the torches and entered the forest. We already knew this area like the back of our hand. The animals of the Black Forest, perhaps used to us, didn't raise any alarm to Samya's nose or to Helen's intuition. Krul happily pulled the cart

through the trees.

She must've taken the shortest route since we arrived at our house so quickly. *Today was a pretty dramatic day.* We released Krul from the cart, and for whatever reason, we all lined up in front of the cabin. Krul and Lucy were by our side too. The light from our torches illuminated our home. It may have looked a bit creepy to some, but I felt a sense of relief.

We all stood there quietly for a spell, and then someone broke the silence.

"Ready, and..."

We all knew what to say next.

"We're home!" we chorused.

I opened the door, knowing that our normal daily lives would begin anew.

Epilogue: The Bride of the Forest

The Black Forest is a terrifying place.

Many people had this impression, and they weren't wrong—dangerous beasts and monsters were indeed lurking among the trees. However, these creatures also followed the rules of nature, and when the season came, new life would be born. During this time, beasts that usually only showed their ferocity would look affectionately at their children. It was as though they were making a statement: *the Black Forest isn't a place that brings only death.*

On this day, Eizo was nervous. Not the most nervous he'd ever been—that distinction went to a moment from his previous life when he'd made a mistake at work and had needed to apologize to a furious client. No, today, he was dressed in a pure white garment. At first, he'd protested, stating that there was no need to go so far, but surrounding influences had strongly urged him to dress up, so he'd had no choice but to do so. Currently, he was walking around in his room, radiating nervousness.

"Why don't you calm down a little?" Marius, Eizo's friend, said with a smile. He was also dressed in lavish attire, which was fitting for his aristocratic station.

"Were you this nervous during your ceremony?" Eizo asked.

"Of course I was."

"Didn't seem like it."

"Well, it's all part of being an aristocrat. I have to look refined." Marius shrugged. This kind of casual conversation between friends was normal for Eizo, and he felt himself loosen up a little.

"I was a bit worried for you, you know," Marius said.

"About what?" Eizo asked.

"I thought you'd never get married."

"Well..." Eizo stopped dead in his tracks—he hadn't planned this at first

either. Thinking back, he'd never anticipated that his life would have this many twists and turns.

"I had hoped you'd find a partner—someone who could make you happy," Marius said, clasping Eizo's shoulder. "You should walk your life alongside someone you care about. Though, I remember you once telling me that your values didn't really prioritize that sort of thing."

"Huh. I said that?" Eizo asked, scratching his nose. He sort of remembered, but didn't totally recall mentioning it.

"It's not anything bad, really."

"I'd assume so for you." Eizo gave a forced laugh. He'd occasionally received reports from Camilo about how happy and intimate Marius and his wife were. "That'll be my goal."

Eizo wished so from the bottom of his heart. *If I'm going to do this, I should keep that in mind. I should pursue happiness...and I shouldn't be bracing myself like this.*

Marius, seeing his friend once again deep in thought, shook his head wearily.

Upon being told that the bride was ready, Eizo left his room. In the space where he normally ate with his family, there was a woman dressed in a pearly white dress. Upon seeing Eizo, she gave a shy smile, illuminated by the sun's rays spilling in from the window.

"You're beautiful," Eizo said. He was unable to think of anything else.

The bride blushed when she heard his words.

"Now then, I guess everyone's waiting for us," Eizo said.

The bride gave a small nod and silently stuck out her hand. Eizo took it and they started to move forward—walking toward a future together.

Afterword

We've already gotten to the seventh volume. Hello, I'm Tamamaru.

This volume is the largest one yet. We still had to shave off a fair bit of the writing—it wouldn't have fit otherwise! My editor, I-san, was like, "Dude, I'm so sorry." Simply put, I didn't have the confidence to cut the story down well, but I hope you were able to enjoy this jam-packed volume!

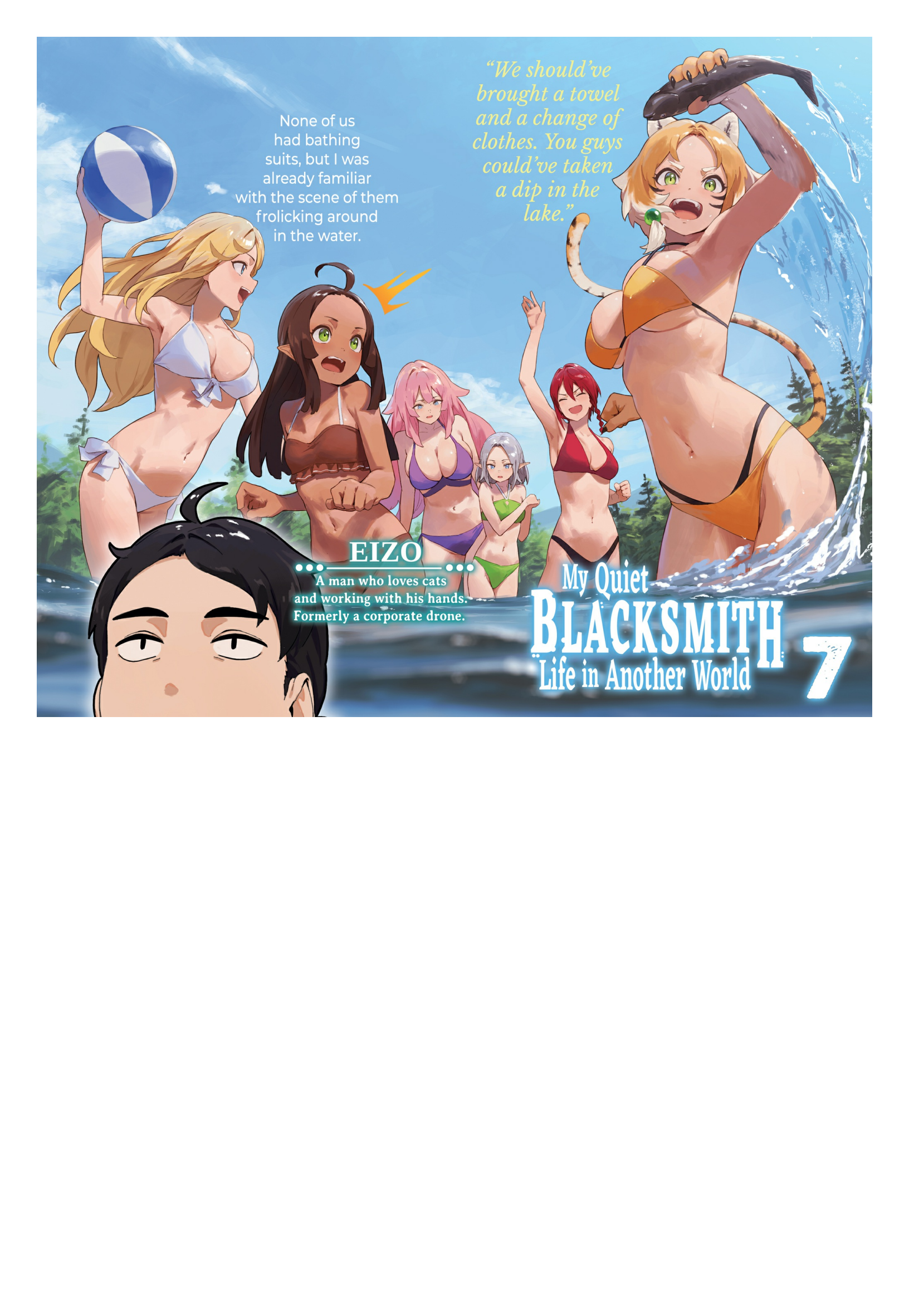
And since this volume's thick enough already, the afterword will naturally be shorter. I actually had quite a few things going on while writing this one, but I'll just be omitting those.

Now, for the acknowledgments.

A huge thank you to Kinta for providing beautiful illustrations once again. Thanks to those images, I was able to go, "Ah, I see..." a lot.

Thank you to Yoshino Himori-sensei for being in charge of the manga serialization. I'm always looking forward to the new chapters. I'd like to thank my friends as well—they've helped me out so much. My two cats, Chama and Konbu, are always there for me, and as always, thank you to my mother and my little sister.

Lastly, I'd like to give my biggest and most heartfelt gratitude to the readers who have continued to follow this series. Let us meet again in the next volume!



None of us
had bathing
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already familiar
with the scene of them
frolicking around
in the water.

*"We should've
brought a towel
and a change of
clothes. You guys
could've taken
a dip in the
lake."*

••• EIZO •••

A man who loves cats
and working with his hands.
Formerly a corporate drone.

My Quiet
BLACKSMITH
Life in Another World

7



ANNE

Seventh imperial princess.
Came to live with Eizo
after the peace conference.

HELEN

A mercenary with the
nickname Lightning Strike.
Uses Forge Eizo as her
home base.

SAMYA

A half-tiger beastfolk.
Came to live with Eizo after
he rescued her from the
brink of death.

RIKE

A dwarf who begged for
an apprenticeship with Eizo
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by his skills.

LIDY

An emissary from an elven
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DIANA

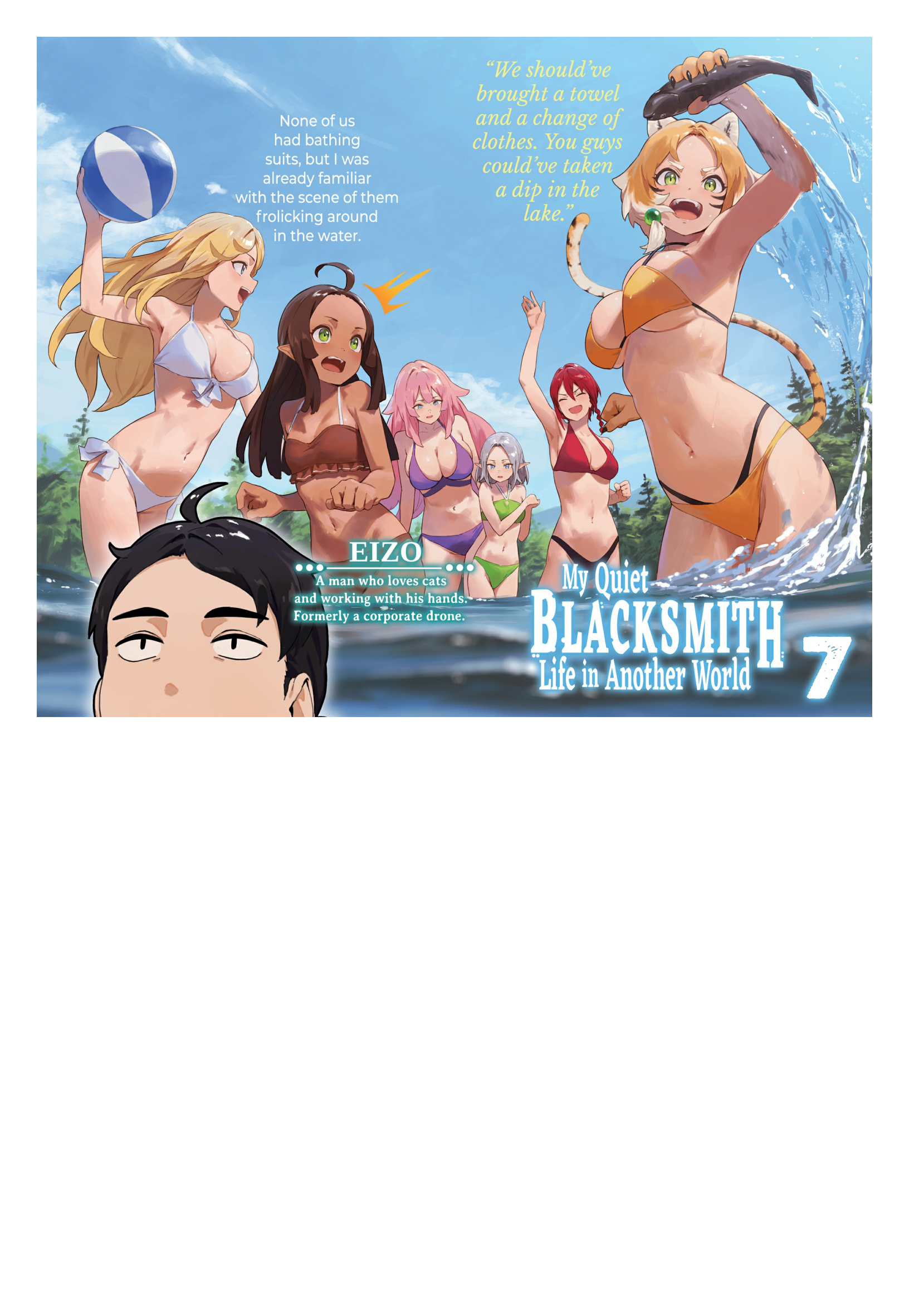
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A tomboy who loves
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Tamamaru
Illustrator Kinta

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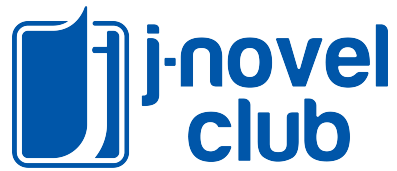
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My Quiet Blacksmith Life in Another World: Volume 7

by Tamamaru

Translated by piyo Edited by C.D. Leeson

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